



LIVED EXPERIENCES OF GAMBLING AND CRIME

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Overview



Research context



Methodology



Core findings

Lived experiences

What needs to happen



Research Context

- Second research commission
- Previous literature review found little knowledge about lived experiences of crime and gambling



**Commission on Crime
& Problem Gambling**

**Howard League
for Penal Reform**

Methodology

Participants

- **22 Interviews**

- 18 interviews with people directly impacted; 4 affected others
- 2,408 minutes of interview data
- Recruited via Twitter, Reddit, agencies supporting people in the criminal justice system / with gambling addiction
- £20 voucher for participation

- **Direct participants**

- Gender identity: 17 males, 1 female
- Ethnicity: 16 white British, 1 Indian, 1 British Pakistani
- Age: 28-60 years; Mean age 41.2 years
- 11 had been to prison for offences resulting from gambling; 1 awaiting sentencing

- **Affected other participants**

- Gender identity: 4 females
- Ethnicity: 4 White British
- Age: 30-52 years, Mean age 42.3 years
- Relationship: 2 dyad interviews married to 2 direct participants; 2 ex-wife

Methodology

Measures

- Semi-structured interview developed in consultation with The Howard League and after attendance at evidence session
- Piloted with direct and affected other participant
- Early experiences of gambling, escalation into crime, criminal justice journey, gambling and crime-related harms, support and treatment, what needs to happen

Procedure and analysis

- Interviews took place online (except 1 telephone) and recorded using Microsoft Teams
- Transcribed verbatim and analysed using principles of Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)
- Ethics approval; LEAS: 2020_4016.

Core findings: Pathways into addiction and crime

Examples



Core findings: Pathways into addiction and crime

Some themes

- Gambling normalisation at a young age
- Sometimes transitions were a factor
- Gambling as escapism / coping
- Often accompanied by mental health deterioration but cause and effect direction unclear
- Importance of large, early wins
- Escalation over time, significant amounts of debt
- Financial crimes
- Access to money through employer; senior positions
- The presence of other addictions not the norm
- Presence of childhood trauma or ACEs not the norm



Core findings: The criminal justice journey

Lack of awareness at every stage



- Police: often no support, do not know what to do, poor attitude:

When I went in, it was like he's nicked half a million from [bank], it was almost a bit of a – 'Well done mate, how did you manage to do that?' Kind of attitude.

- Bail: Often long delays, in limbo, life back on track then sentenced, but can be opportunity to address addiction:

I would say it's about a year and half before I was told I was being charged, so about you and half before I got a letter from Chester Police Station; so I was left the entire time thinking – Am I being charged? What's going on? Have they forgotten? You kind of rebuild your life in that time as well.

- Defence solicitors: Very little understanding, often advising no comment but dissonance between handing self in and wanting to be open; clients often gathering information for mitigating circumstances
- Pre-sentence report: some understanding but little influence in court

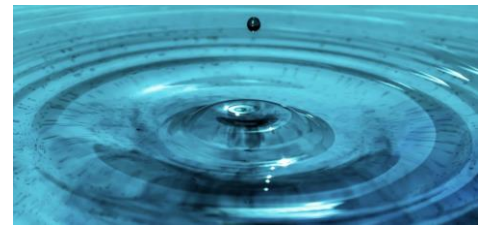
Core findings: The criminal justice journey (continued)

Lack of awareness at every stage

- Judiciary: Lack of empathy over addiction but where this is recognised, less punitive outcomes e.g. suspended sentence.
- Prison: no systematic screening and monitoring, gambling behaviours encouraged by staff, gambling as a part of prison sub-culture, people under the radar, no gambling specific support or treatment offered:
 - “We don’t do anything for gambling here.”*
 - “We don’t have a problem with gambling.”*
- Probation: low risk therefore low interaction but does not mean don’t require or want support; very little knowledge; supervisees advising Case Managers.
- Proceeds of Crime Act Hearings: used often; people not ‘benefiting’ from stolen monies; often has biggest impact on family; long term impact.

Core findings: Gambling and crime related harm

Multiple impacts and a ripple effect in the family



- **Mental and physical health:** neglect, double burden of addiction and crime; high prevalence of suicidal ideation and intent:

I drove myself to Halford's, where I bought myself a tow rope, I drove to a wooded area...I had written suicide notes to my mother, to my kids and to my ex. I had sent messages to people leading up to it that morning. My phone was off because I didn't want to be found; I went into a wooded area, the first suicide attempt was a cry for help, this time I was very determined, I was at peace with myself. I climbed the tree with this tow rope and tied it round.

- **Employment:** loss of job as a result of addiction and commission of crime then disclosure of offences to future employers e.g. 4 year sentence never spent under Rehabilitation of Offenders Act (1974, amended 2014).
- **Finances:** harm from gambling addictions but additional burden of Proceeds of Crime Act hearings (POCA).
- **Accommodation:** linked to financial harms/POCA; exacerbated by prison and relationship breakdown.
- **Family:** relationship breakdown, unable to see children, impact on children, partners left to carry on and deal with issues such as POCA; very little support.

Core findings

Lack of safeguarding by operators



- Multiple accounts:

I was in the bookies between 5:00 and 6:00 everyday with £500 in cash, I transacted £4.8 million just online alone, and I had 93 separate betting accounts across 18 different operators. People say how did you have 93 accounts? It wasn't with 93 different operators, there were 18 accounts just with [operator]. I lost somewhere in the region of 3/4 of a million pounds with [operator], and all I ever change was the username at the side there, I used the same payment method, I used the same everything... So even though I had 18 accounts, and self excluded 17 times, they allowed you to open a new account with a different username.

- No duty of care:

The floor manager came over to me and said – You've been in here for two days mate, are you alright? I said – Yeah, fine. He asked me if I needed a coffee or anything, I said I would have a coffee please mate. And he went and got me a coffee and that was it. So I spoke to a lot of the dealers and they would make jokes like – I've had two days off and you're still here. And became a bit of a – 'This must be a record, this has got to be a record, you can't go home yet, you've got to make it another few hours!'

- Affordability checks and VIP schemes:

For them to keep their licence they have to satisfy a certain set of conditions, anti money laundering affordability checks, know your customer, and they didn't do any of that, they just made me a VIP because I was losing so much; encouraging me to bet, the amount of bonuses; if I didn't bet for a few days, because I had no money, suddenly I get a message saying that they had put £1000 in my account, off you go again.

Core findings

Problems with advertising and gambling warnings

- Advertising is pervasive:

It's just in your face all the time. it's everywhere you look, on the radio, popping up on your phone and on Facebook. [Our son] is 11, and he went on something, and then up popped a gambling advert, and you think 'for goodness sake they are everywhere'.

- Current warnings not effective:

[On when the fun stops, stop] It's embarrassing isn't it? It's the easiest thing to say in the world isn't it, but it's too late at that point for the problem gamblers. I do think of it a lot, I was suffering in silence, and most people do. People deal with it differently, but I was still able to go about my daily routine, but I was having to tread carefully, but when the fun stops stop, absolute load of rubbish. It's a token gesture isn't it?

- Warnings do not consider cultural differences:

The adverts are about gambling responsibly, and this doesn't really work with the minority communities where it's not in the tradition, it may not be a thing that people do, so what happens is there is a lack of trust there to engage, all they want you to do is gamble and spend your money, just do it safely. How is that possible? So the relationship between gambling companies and minority individuals, needs a rethink in that way.

Core findings: Support and treatment

Lack of awareness and availability

- GPs a common first contact for support but lack of awareness and referral pathways:

Funnily enough, I went to my GP and they said they couldn't do anything for me, and I said – Well I've just tried to commit suicide, I have committed crimes. And he said - Are you telling me you've got a gambling problem or have you got mental health problems?

- People often having to research support themselves, not readily available. However, when have accessed support e.g. through Gordon Moody, Gamcare and partners, or the National Problem Gambling Clinic, this had been helpful but waiting lists in operation; travel costs:

I called [provider] I think for counselling, started the ball rolling. I ...had an assessment and went onto a waiting list. I don't think I heard from them for about four or five weeks later.

What needs to happen

Criminal Justice Reform

- Greater awareness at all stages of the criminal justice process: police, legal teams, judiciary, prisons, probation:

The best way that you can support people is to improve the awareness and education of the actual system.

- People screened for presence of gambling addiction.
- Greater consideration of pre-sentence reports and gambling addiction as a mitigating factor.
- Clear and simple referral pathways.
- Availability of suitable services to support people once disclosed: support for the addiction, practical problems, resettlement and for affected others.
- Review of the use of POCA for crimes resulting from gambling addiction.
- Joined up approach between Gambling Commission investigations, operator payments and sentencing.

What needs to happen

Regulation and advertising

- Greater regulation by the Gambling Commission for operators regarding affordability checks, VIP packages and multiple accounts; policy needs to facilitate this.
- Greater responsibility and accountability for banks to question high volume gambling transactions.
- Greater regulation on advertising akin to tobacco reforms.
- Review of gambling warnings to try to find something more effective.



What needs to happen

Greater access to timely support

- Primary care:

If people are presenting themselves to GP's, it's really important that they're signposted to the right places.

- Awareness of services and a joined up public health and CJS approach:

There probably should be a flow chart of support services put together that says this is what you need to do at each stage; this is what's going to happen to you, this is the legal system, this is where you can gain support, this is what you need to do before this court hearing, and this is where you can find that support.

- Counselling for addiction but also to manage the shame, support affected others, and deal with practical issues:

What pushed me over the edge wasn't exactly the debt, it was the shame of it; so I think I just want to emphasise that I think work needs to be done on the impact of shame on individuals.

- More investment in support and treatment to reduce waiting times.
- Lived experience also important in support offer.

What needs to happen

The importance of language

- Reconsideration of 'problem gambling'

There's still too much stigma attached to addiction, I think it discourages people to come forward, we took a look at about a lot of organisations using the words 'problem gambler', a lot of the companies talk about responsible gambling, but what does that really mean? ...When they see the word problem gambler, somebody says well I have a problem don't I? So it's not going to increase their thinking of seeking help - who can I reach out to if I'm just seen as a problem?



What needs to happen

Greater awareness

- Greater awareness amongst employers; robust audit trails and accountability (but avoidance of victim blaming).
- Importance of lived experience in awareness building and policy making.
- Awareness sessions in education providers at all levels:

People are not aware because people think it's a choice, up to a point it could be a choice, generally, but we know scientifically that it changes neuropathways, in terms of the addiction, I think that should be the focus in terms of education.

- Improved community awareness:

Education to the faith leaders in the community, so what should be the community response, and I think that is essential because one comment can tip somebody over the edge, one individual could say something and that would drive somebody to have a relapse

Future research



- **Women, ethnic minority groups and religious communities** – possibly led by people with lived experience
- Other **types of crime** e.g. domestic violence
- Gambling as **part of a criminal lifestyle**
- People who **develop gambling problems in prison**
- Longitudinal studies:
 - **Families** affected by gambling and crime
 - **Support and treatment outcomes**
 - **Evaluation** following changes in policy, regulation and advertising
 - **Awareness** over time
 - **Evaluation of criminal justice reforms** in relation to problem gambling, including effectiveness of referral and support.

Conclusions

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- In-depth accounts from people with lived experience of gambling and crime.
 - Widespread challenges across policy, the Criminal Justice System, health, education and industry.
 - Lots of suggestions for improvement.
 - Also a vast amount of future research opportunities.



Questions



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