



Commission on Crime and Problem Gambling
Lived experience research meeting
Tuesday 23 November 2021
Zoom session
2.00pm – 3.30pm

Present: Lord Goldsmith (Chair), Andrew Black, Henrietta Bowden-Jones, Andrea Coomber, Elizabeth Morony, Andrew Neilson, Neil Platt

Apologies: Matt Burton, John Chisholm, Jon Collins, Sarah Ramanauskas, Gerda Reith, Norma Stephenson, Sue Wade

In attendance: Gemma Buckland, Helen Churcher, Anita Dockley, Robert Preece, David Taylor (Gambling Commission), Catryn Yousefi

Agenda

Chair's introduction

The Chair welcomed Andrea Coomber, the new Chief Executive of the Howard League and new member of the Commission on Crime and Problem Gambling. The Chair gave apologies for those unable to attend. The Chair gave an overview of the session and welcomed Lauren Smith (University of Lincoln). The Chair also welcomed David Taylor who was attending the meeting on behalf of the Gambling Commission.

Presentation of research findings (Lauren Smith, University of Lincoln)

Lauren Smith presented the key findings of the lived experience research. A copy of the slides is [available here](#).

Questions from Commissioners

The Chair asked the following question:
How representative was the research sample?

Lauren Smith noted the representation within the sample was one limitation with the research. Despite being a predominantly white male sample, existing research shows that women and people from ethnic minority communities experience gambling related harms and form a significant proportion of people engaged in gambling or experiencing gambling related harm and crime. This would be an avenue for future research. Lauren Smith explained the ways in which she tried to broaden the sample through various avenues of promotion. One participant recognised the needed for more research with people from ethnic minority communities, and that this research would need to be built on trust and community representation.

Henrietta Bowden-Jones noted that the findings were consistent with her experience in the national gambling clinic, and with the previous learning of the commission. Lauren Smith agreed, noting that data saturation had been reached with the sample group.

Henrietta Bowden-Jones the following question:

Are people still able to create multiple online gambling accounts?

Lauren Smith noted that legislation and practice has in recent years changed to stop the creation of multiple accounts. The evidence gathered reflected that happened in the past. However, there was evidence that people were still able to create multiple accounts and get around exclusion policies. Lauren Smith also highlighted the problems with enticements such as free spins, encouraging people to return to gambling.

Lord Goldsmith asked the following question:

How does POCA operate? Is it based on strict rules?

Lauren Smith noted that participants explained how their assets were assessed and taken into consideration even if they were under a joint name, or belonged to their spouse (e.g., house, car). There were long-term implications of the current approach, with individuals under the obligation to continue paying back money, and impacts on future work, savings, and inheritance.

Commissioners were informed of ongoing engagement with officials at the Ministry of Justice regarding POCA. The Ministry of Justice were engaged in talks with the Home Office. Improved guidance regarding confiscations would be a positive result for the Commission.

David Taylor (Gambling Commission) thanked Lauren Smith for the presentation and noted that he would relay evidence back to his colleagues at the Gambling Commission. He asked the following question:

Did you get an impression as to when and how participants felt an intervention would've been most helpful?

Lauren Smith relayed participants' views that every opportunity to provide awareness and offer interventions to be taken. It was important that support was available at every opportunity, to allow people to engage as and when they are ready to seek help. Awareness and support should come through multiple avenues: operators, health services, the criminal justice system, banks, education providers. Participants said that support should be offered sooner and for questions to be asked (e.g. about behaviour, about affordability).

Henrietta Bowden-Jones asked the following question:

Did participants inherit bunk debts in prison?

Andrea Coomber shared evidence of this occurring at a prison (committing an act of violence to be placed in segregation and thus avoid a gambling debt). Lauren Smith explained that this question had not been asked specifically, but that there was widespread reporting of gambling as a prison subculture. Lauren Smith also noted

that people in prison could become vulnerable to exploitation if the amount of money they had stolen was reported in the media.

The Chair thanked Lauren Smith for her presentation, and thanked David Taylor for attending.

Key themes and learning points

The Chair opened the floor to Anita Dockley to sum up the key themes and learning points from the research. The research was representative of the dominant narrative of gambling related crime (white, male, middle-aged, first-time offender, large scale theft). The upcoming peer research projects with women and people from ethnic minority communities would diversify the Commission's findings. The Commission should move away from a one size fits all approach - there are multiple stories and opportunities for services and the criminal justice system to engage with people experiencing gambling related harm.

Anita Dockley noted that ongoing research with people with lived experience has highlighted problems with language used e.g. problem gambling, affected others. Going forward, the Commission would consider these challenges when formulating ideas.

Key themes arising from the research included:

- Systemic inadequacy of the criminal justice system's response to gambling related harm and gambling addiction
- Selfhood- self-reliance, handing oneself in, self-exclusion - in the gambling world, the onus is on the individual
- Transitions as points of vulnerability - something to explore going forward
- Public health.

The research has highlighted lots of themes and opportunities to engage on within and beyond the criminal justice system including NICE guidelines, POCA, the legal profession, the sentencing council.

Update on current and future research programmes

The Chair invited Anita Dockley to provide an update on future research plans.

Anita Dockley informed Commissioners that, in response to Lauren Smith's findings, peer research into the experiences of women and people from ethnic minority communities had been commissioned. This different strategy was needed to engage different groups. The research would be in partnership with Betknowmore. Julie Trebilcock (Middlesex University) and Nicola Harding (Lancaster University) had been commissioned for the women's project and recruitment for peer researchers would begin soon. There were some challenges in recruiting researchers for the ethnic minority project but it was hoped that this would be resolved soon. Research was also being conducted in house looking at police practice and policy, including data about screening in police custody and gambling related crime. A first draft has been completed of this research and will be published early 2022. Anita Dockley and Neil Platt would meet to discuss the results of the PCC surveys.

The Commission's research findings would be disseminated at several conferences (Cardiff, May 2022; Boston, July 2022; Howard League conference, September 2022).

The Howard League team were developing ideas for smaller pieces of future research to be communicated with Commissioners in due course. These included research on prison culture and domestic abuse to be completed by the end of 2022, coinciding with the formal end of the Commission.

AOB

Commissioners were informed that the Howard League team were pulling together ideas and recommendations, and a planning meeting would be held between Lord Goldsmith, Andrea Coomber, Andrew Neilson and Anita Dockley. The ideas and decisions arising from this meeting would be shared with Commissioners in the New Year at the business meeting. Commissioners could also discuss the possibility of international visits.

Future meetings

TBC, to be communicated to Commissioners in the New Year.

Agreed by the Chair 09/12/21

CY/HC 08/12/21