

Gambling Availability Increases Addictivity

Gambling promoters frequently maintain that there is little, if any, relationship between the availability of gambling and gambling addiction. However, testimony from experts and data from gambling communities indicate otherwise. Indeed, a prominent expansion in the number of problem and pathological gamblers in the United States have closely paralleled the phenomenal explosion of legal gambling opportunities in the 1970s.

The number of Gamblers Anonymous chapters in the United States has nearly doubled in the last eight years. CA now has more than 1,200 chapters meeting regularly across the country. Gambling surveys in the state of Iowa showed a marked increase in the number of problem and pathological gamblers after the introduction of casinos. In 1989, only 1.7 percent of Iowa adults showed indications of having a serious gambling problem. By 1995, the percentage had more than tripled to 5.4 percent. In New York, the percentage of individuals who report having had a gambling problem increased from 4.2 percent in 1986 to 7.3 percent a decade later, as gambling opportunities greatly expanded. In Oregon, the number of Gamblers Anonymous chapters increased from three to more than 30 within five years of the introduction of video poker machines. Gambling addiction experts contend video poker is among the most addictive forms of gambling. Two gambling behavior surveys conducted in Minnesota show a substantial increase in the number of compulsive gamblers coincidental with the expansion of gambling in that state. The lottery was introduced in Minnesota in 1990, while casino gambling was just gaining a foothold in that year. By 1994, however, there were 17 casinos in operation in Minnesota with estimated gross annual sales of between \$5 billion to \$4 billion. The percentage of Minnesota adults who demonstrated a serious of gambling problem in the past year climbed from 2.5 percent of the population in 1990 to 4.4 percent in 1994.

Gambling and Tourism

The gambling industry holds out the promise of tourists (and an influx of tourist dollars) wherever it attempts to expand. No longer is the industry limited to the traditional casinos and Las Vegas model, in which an estimated 85 percent of profits come from out-of-state gamblers. Most gambling enterprises merely transferring wealth from the community to large casinos make their profits from the pockets of the local citizenry, thus companies, many of which are located out of state.

According to gambling researcher William Thompson, a professor at the University of Nevada-Las Vegas, "Casinos have a negative impact on the community unless 50 percent of the gamblers come from out of state." A survey of Illinois riverboat gamblers conducted in 1995 found that 85 percent lived within 50 miles of the floating casino at which they were gambling. A study by Iowa State University reported that 94 percent of gamblers at the Prairie Meadows Race Track and Casino in Des Moines came from within the state. Nearly two-thirds came from the county in which the racetrack is located. Eighty percent of Wisconsin casino revenues come from Wisconsin residents, according to a study released in 1995. A survey of gamblers inside a Kansas City, Missouri, casino found that 88 percent lived within 45 minutes of the casino. Another survey of Kansas City casinos, which are located on or near the Missouri river across from the Kansas border, found that 94 percent of cars in the casino parking lots bore either Missouri or Kansas license plates. At the shore-lined New Orleans land-based casino, local residents made up 60 percent of the clientele. The 1995 United States Survey of Gaming and Gambling gives further evidence that casinos are primarily a local draw. The survey found that among respondents with a casino in or near their community, 40 percent gambled in that year, compared to only 17 percent of those who lived at least 100 miles from a casino. Further, among casino gamblers, 42 percent of those with a casino in or near their community gambled at least every three months, compared with only 17 percent of casino gamblers living 100 miles away from a casino.

Gambling's Impact on Families

The tragedy of gambling addiction reaches far beyond the more than 15 million Americans who are problem or pathological gamblers. Employers, work associates, friends, and taxpayers often pay a steep price as well. However, it is family members who bear the brunt of the pain and misery that accompanies this addiction. In addition to material deprivations, family members frequently experience the trauma of divorce, child abuse and neglect, and domestic violence.

Divorce

In a survey of nearly 400 Gamblers Anonymous members, 28 percent reported being either separated or divorced as a direct result of their gambling problems.

The National Gambling Impact Study Commission reported that it received "abundant testimony and evidence that compulsive gambling introduces a greatly heightened level of stress and tension into marriages and families, often culminating in divorce and other manifestations of familial disharmony."

The number of divorces in Harrison County, Mississippi, has nearly tripled since the introduction of casinos. The county, which is home to ten casinos, has averaged an additional 850 divorces per year since casinos arrived.

A nationwide survey undertaken for the National Gambling Impact Study Commission found that "respondents representing 2 million adults identified a spouse's gambling as a significant factor in a prior divorce."

Child Abuse and Neglect

The National Gambling Impact Study Commission reported: "Children of compulsive gamblers are often prone to suffer abuse, as well as neglect, as a result of parental problem or pathological gambling."

In Indiana, a review of the state's gaming commission records revealed that 72 children were found abandoned on casino premises during a 14-month period.

Gambling's Effects on Local Businesses

Much of the gambling industry's rapid expansion in recent years can be attributed to its effective courting of local business leaders, who have been enticed by promises of increased tourism and economic development. In community after community, however, the promises of the industry have failed to come to fruition. Worse, local businesses suffer as discretionary dollars are drained from the economy, and as they and their communities experience the social fallout that typically accompanies legalized gambling.

The number of independent restaurants in Atlantic City dropped from 48 the year casinos opened to 16 in 1997.5 Within just four years of the casinos' arrival, one-third of the city's retail business was shut down. A University of South Dakota study showed that retail and service businesses in South Dakota suffered a net loss of approximately \$60 million in anticipated sales in the year following the introduction of gambling. In a survey of 906 Minnesota restaurant owners, 88 percent said they had lost business due to gambling. Only 10 percent reported an increase in business due to the existence of casinos. According to a study commissioned by New York's Gov. Pataki, 1,208 more jobs will be lost, rather than gained with gambling expansion. These jobs will be lost because western New Yorkers will most likely change their spending habits with the onslaught of stand-alone casinos. More than half of business owners in Illinois riverboat casinos towns reported either a negative effect or no effect on their business from the presence of casinos. Only 3 percent of respondents said their businesses had been "helped a lot" by the casinos. More than 70 percent of businesses in Natchez, Mississippi, reported declining sales within a few months of the opening of that city's first riverboat. Iowa State University researchers surveyed business owners in Clinton, Iowa, to determine how they had been affected by the presence of a riverboat casino. Twelve percent indicated business had increased, while 29 percent reported a decrease. Sixty percent said they had witnessed no change.

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Ask some smart questions:

Contact the Mayor's office (215-686-2181), your representatives, and also local community groups. Why hasn't the city done a cost/benefit analysis? Can we really afford to gamble the our future away on casinos?

www.casinofreephila.org

What's Next?

Gambling and Corruption

Gambling "has more of a history of corruption than any other industry," former Illinois Senator Paul Simon testified at the opening meeting of the National Gambling Impact Study Commission in June 1997. Indeed, Simon's statement has abundant basis in fact. Gambling-related political corruption became so widespread in the 1800s that every state in the union eventually outlawed lotteries and all other forms of gambling. Today, history appears to be repeating itself. The recent wave of gambling expansion in the United States has spawned another epidemic of political corruption.

Four of Atlantic City's last seven mayors have been found guilty of or pleaded guilty to corruption charges.

Two former West Virginia Senate Presidents were sentenced to prison for taking money from gambling interests. One was charged with soliciting \$15,000 from a casino company to help pass a bill that would have allowed casinos in the state. The other was convicted for accepting an illegal \$10,000 payment from gambling interests.

Nineteen Arizona legislators and lobbyists were caught on videotape taking money after agreeing to vote for legalized gambling. Six lawmakers eventually accepted plea bargains; another was convicted of conspiracy for taking \$25,000 from an undercover agent.

The FBI launched a two-year investigation into the activities of more than a dozen Louisiana legislators suspected of accepting bribes from gambling interests.7 One former state senator, who chaired the senate committee overseeing gambling matters, has been convicted of racketeering-related charges in the investigation. A representative who sat on a similar committee in the Louisiana House resigned after admitting to using his influence to help two organized-crime-controlled video poker companies in exchange for gifts.

Missouri's House Speaker of 15 years resigned in 1996 in the wake of a federal investigation induced by charges of gambling-related dealings. According to media reports, the ex-speaker demanded that a gambling company direct payments of \$16 million toward the ex-speaker's friends and business associates in order to secure a casino license in the state.

Adolescent Gambling

The next generation is the first in modern American history to grow up in an era when gambling is legally sanctioned and culturally approved. Tragically, adolescents have proven extremely susceptible to the enticements of gambling, and are becoming hooked at rates even greater than their adult counterparts. Scholars and researchers caution that we may only be seeing the "tip of the iceberg," and that the seeds of destruction being sown in these young lives today portend immense individual and cultural devastation as we enter the 21st century.

for specifics, see www.casinofreephila.org/node/35

