

GAMBLING AND ADDICTION

Introduction

Gambling is increasingly becoming a critical problem in Kenya. Gambling is being validated by the media and has become accepted especially lotteries. Many people in Kenya do not consider buying lottery tickets or raffle tickets for charitable purposes as gambling and yet there is clearly some anticipation of these tickets whether or not a large amount of money or time is invested in their purchase. This is a topic that requires counsellor's attention since there could be many people unconsciously suffering from gambling addiction that require therapeutic attention.

Definition

Gambling is the act of risking something of value including money, property or valuables on the outcome of a game, contest or other activities in which the outcome is partially or totally dependent upon chance. Though for many gambling is a form of recreation like any behaviour which involves variation brain chemistry, it can become addictive and harmful. The reinforcement phenomena of gambling make the gambler persist in gambling even when they are losing. This eventually leads to addiction and gambling becomes psychologically addictive and compulsive and therefore difficult to control.

Importance of gambling addiction information to therapists

Today gambling represents an enormous recreational growth industry. Awareness of the fact about gambling behaviour can help counsellors in three ways;

- Distinguishing social or recreational gambling from problem gambling
- Understanding the social climate of recreational gambling, provides useful information about the environments that problem gamblers need to cope with if they are to maintain recovery.
- Awareness of the political conflicts that gambling growth causes in the culture may assist counsellors in avoiding needless disputes.

Types of gambling

There many types of gambling. Counsellors need to understand types of gambling to able help their clients. Some of the common types of gambling include;

- Lotteries: Lotteries exists in several formats;
 - Instant games or scratch tickets that reveal winning numbers or daily three or four digit number games.
 - Lotto games in which bettors choose a few numbers and greater jack pots.
 - Video scenes in which bettors choose a few numbers out of a larger group and several drawing daily are displayed on videos screens.
 - Electronic gaming devices that involve individual computer terminals linked to many games that provide instant results.
- Convenience gambling: These gambling forms are found in convenience food stores, bars, airports as opposed to casinos, whose entire purpose is to attract gambling. They include stand – alone slot machine and other electronic gambling devices such as video poker.
- Casinos: these are legalised in many states including Kenya.
- Sports wagering. This sport where people try to guess what will be the results os a game or sport. The person who guesses wrong has to give money to the person who guesses right. Example is the Sport Pesa.
- Internet related gambling. This is an online gambling.

Types of gamblers

There six types of gamblers identified by scholars, these are;

1. **Professional gamblers:** this group of gamblers makes their living by gambling and thus consider it a profession. They are skilled in the games they choose to play and they are able to control both the amount of money and time spent gambling and therefore, they are

not directed to gambling. They patiently wait for the best bet and then try to win as much as they can

2. **Antisocial personality gamblers:** These gamblers use gambling as means of getting money through illegal means. They attempt to use a compulsive gambling diagnosis as illegal defence.
3. **Casual gamblers:** They are also known as social gamblers. They gamble for entertainment and sociability. This gambling rarely becomes a problem or pathological unless it is a response to trauma or predisposing factor. Social gambling does not interfere with family, social or vocational obligations. For example involvement in lottery.
4. **Serious social gamblers:** These gamblers invest more of their time in gambling. To them gambling is a major source of relaxation and entertainment. They place gambling second in importance to family and vocation. Therefore this group of gamblers have control over their gambling addiction.
5. **Relief and escape gamblers:** This group of gamblers find relief from anxiety, depression, anger, boredom or loneliness by engaging in gambling. To them gambling is a way of escaping from crisis or difficulties. Gambling provides analgesic effect rather than euphoric response. They are not compulsive gamblers, but identical to relief and escape alcohol drinkers.
6. **Compulsive gamblers:** These are gamblers who have lost control over their gambling. They take gambling as the most important thing in their lives. Compulsive gambling is a progressive addiction that harms every aspect of the gamblers life. As compulsive gamblers continue gambling their families, friends and employers are negatively affected. Compulsive gamblers engage in activities such as lying, stealing or embezzling which go against their moral standards. They cannot stop gambling no matter how much they want or how hard they try, they are simply addicted.

What is gambling addiction?

Gambling addiction is an urge to gamble despite harmful negative or a desire to stop. Gambling addiction is a behavioural addiction. Gambling becomes a compulsive behaviour and the

gambler is unable to control it. Gambling is not necessarily bad. However, if one is addicted it becomes gambling problem and pathological.

Problem gambling is defined by whether harm is experienced by the gambler or others rather than by the gambler's behaviour. Problem gambling is most considered compulsive by many professionals. Gambling problem can have a significant impact on families. Some of the common family impacts include; impaired family relationships, family conflicts, mistrust, communication breakdown and confusion about family roles and responsibilities. Gamblers can have a problem without being out of control.

Severe problem of gambling can be diagnosed as clinical pathological gambling if the gamblers meet certain criteria. Pathological gambling is recognised as psychiatric disorder in DSM IV. Pathological is a progressive disorder characterized by a continuous or periodic loss of control over gambling, a preoccupation with gambling and with obtaining money with which to gamble; irrational thinking and continuation of the behaviour despite consequences (Rosenthal 19912).

Gambling addiction is known as compulsive or gambling disorder. Compulsive gamblers cannot control the impulse to gamble even when it is hurting themselves or their loved ones.

Compulsive gamblers keep gambling no matter the consequences, even when they know the odds are against them or they cannot afford to lose. People with gambling addiction often have behaviour or mood disorders.

Gambling was recognized as a clinical problem in Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorder Fourth edition (DSM IV). The essential feature of pathological gambling according to DSM IV is persistent and recurrent maladaptive gambling behaviour that disrupts personal, family or vocational pursuits. In DSM V pathological gambling was renamed gambling disorder. Whereas pathological gambling was classified as an Impulse-Control Disorder Not Elsewhere classified, gambling disorder is categorized under Substance Related and Addictive Disorders. Reclassification may improve treatment coverage, diagnostic accuracy and screening efforts.

According to DSM V Gambling disorder is persistent and recurrent problematic gambling behaviour leading to clinically impairment of distress as indicated by individual exhibiting four (or more) of the following in 12 month period.

1. Needs to gamble with increasing amount of money in order to achieve the desired excitement.
2. Is restless or irritable when attempting to cut down or stop gambling.
3. Has made repeated unsuccessful efforts to control, cut back or stop gambling.
4. Is often preoccupied with gambling (e.g., having persistent thoughts of relieving past gambling experiences, handicapping or planning the next venture, thinking of ways to get money which to gamble).
5. Often gambles when feeling distress (e.g., helplessness, guilty, anxious, depressed)
6. After losing money gambling, often returns another day to get even (“chasing” one’s losses).
7. Lies to conceal the extent of involvement with gambling.
8. Has jeopardized or lost a significant relationship, job or educational or career opportunity because of gambling.
9. Relies on others to provide money to relieve desperate financial situations caused by gambling.

Differences between gambling and substance abuse

According to Ciarrocchi (2002) there are two major differences between gambling and substance abuse. The first major difference relates to issues around egotism and entitlement. A large numbers of gamblers exhibit these features than other addicted population. Egotism leads to such an inflated sense of the self that beating the odds becomes a normal expectation. The second major difference between problems gambling and substance abuse pertains to the nature of the addiction. Alcohol and drug abuse addiction requires ingesting some external substance while problem gambling is a pure “psychological compulsion”. Psychological and physical experience captivates millions of people annually, resulting in their spending huge amounts of money.

Causes of gambling addiction

To be to help or rehabilitate gambling addicts, it is important for therapists to be informed with reasons why people engage in gambling, these are;

- **Motivation to gambling:** People engage in gambling due to the prizes or benefits associated with it and the more attractive the prize is the more the people engage in gambling.
- **Risk taking:** It is human nature to feel excited when taking risks and the positive feelings gained from gambling is not different. Some of the questions that raise a sense of anticipation “will my number come” or “will my team win”. These questions create a natural high adrenalin rush a feeling that many seek when looking for entertainment. This is a feeling some people belief cannot live without.
- **Escapism:** The gambling environment can provide an escape from everyday life. People may engage in gambling to find relief from feeling of anxiety, depression, anger, boredom or loneliness or any kind of crisis or difficult.
- **Glamorous:** The media and advertisements companies often portray a stylish, sexy, fashionable image of gambling. In Films and televisions people see characters enjoying a night at the casino or an attention at the races.
- **Social reason:** Where gambling is accepted as part of a country’s culture, many people may engage in gambling. Some young people are introduced to gambling by learning to play cards with their parents at home. Such youths may end up going to casino with friends after school for amusements.

Phases of gambling addiction

There are mainly three phases of gambling;

- **The minimum phase:** This is the time when the gambler wins at gambling at multiple times leaving them with unreasonable optimism “that they will keep on winning”. Such gamblers begin to love gambling and trust that their luck will not run out. In this phase a gambler keeps on gambling until the losing phase.
- **Losing phase:** In this stage the gambling addicts begin to withdraw from friends and family. A gambler starts gambling alone and considers borrowing money by legal or illegal means. They become isolated by their gambling and this infiltrates their home lies. As the gamblers increase the quantity and amount of their gambling, their debts become a problem. The gamblers start chasing their losses, wanting to return to gambling directly after lose with a hope of winning their money back.
- **Desperation phase:** This phase occurs when the gambler spends more and more time gambling. This excessive time spent gambling leads the gamblers feeling guilt and start blaming others for their problems. They end up alienating their family and friends. At this phase the gamblers may begin to engage in illegal acts in order to raise money for gambling. The gamblers may turn to alcohol or drugs to compact the helplessness they feel and experience psychological and social problems such as depression, emotional collapse and divorce and suicide ideation.

Treatment of gambling addiction

Cognitive therapy

Gambling is related to cognitive distortions. Many gamblers have or acquire a belief that they will be successful and thus tends to persist despite seemingly convincing evidence to the contrary. People interpretations of gambling might be biased and thus influence their gambling persistence.

Social – cognitive theory state that people have a variety of cognitive schemas or relatively persistent way of looking at the universe that work very well for us most of the time. According to social cognitive there are three reasons for persistence gambling;

- Our illusions of control lead us to persist because we have unrealistic confidence in our ability to influence even the random numbers. Illusion of control is influenced by;
 - Personal choice: People believe their lottery ticket is worth more if they personally select it rather than when randomly distributed.
 - Practice: People believe they have a greater chance of winning a totally random game when they are given a chance to practice with apparatus.
 - Early wins: People who correctly predict heads or tail early in a sequence of coin tossing believe more strongly in their control than those who do not.
 - Familiarity: People who are familiar with situations believe more strongly in their sense of control than people who are less familiar with it even though chance determines the outcomes.
 - Type of competitor: People wager more against a seemingly incompetent bettor and seemingly competent one even though, once again the outcomes is totally determined by chance.
- Our tendency to interpret outcomes in a self-serving way leads to our not using outcomes data effectively. We view success as related to our ability but failure as external. Once again this contributes in our ability to succeed at gambling.
- The very way our minds work to organize cause – effect relationships lead us to believe random events are actually related. Bolstered by this (mis) belief we again assume an unwarranted confidence in our ability to predict and control future outcomes and wager unrealistically.

Cognitive distortions take various forms, but taken together, they increase people's expectations about their probabilities of success in future gambling. Cognitive therapy in treating gambling has wide acceptance. The main goal of cognitive therapy is to help the client minimize the gambling addictive behaviour by acquiring a more realistic and workable philosophy in life. This involves;

- Assessing the clients gambling belief about gambling as an enterprise.
- Challenging gambling beliefs about gambling as an enterprise or process by examining the individual's motivation and perceptions.
- Challenging illusions of control. Help the client to see whether his assumptions actually work.
- Encourage the client have positive automatic thoughts.
- Helping client deal with emotional and financial consequences involved with the addictive behaviour.
- Encourage the recovering gambling addicts to form or join the gamblers anonymous (GA) a self help group for the gamblers.

Psychodynamic therapy

In psychodynamic therapy the therapists try to uncover the underlying psychological factors that trigger gambling. This approach can be successful for people who gamble to escape from crisis. The basic therapeutic skills techniques include, listening, empathy and interpretations. The main therapeutic goal is to make the unconscious conscious and strengthen the client's ego so that gambling behaviours is based on reality and less on instinctual cravings. The therapist helps the client to probe deep into the past and develop the level of self – understanding necessary for change.

Behavioural therapy

The behavioural therapy helps the gambling addicts to formulate specific goals focus on behaviour change. The behavioural theories assert that addictive behaviours are learnt. The main goal of the therapist is help the clients to unlearn the gambling behaviour. The therapist helps clients to identify what reinforces gambling addiction. Some of behavioural theories techniques helpful in treating gambling addicts include;

- Assessment
- Teach client relaxation to be able to cope with stresses of life that could be leading to gambling as an escapist behaviour.

- Assertive training. This focuses on clients' negative self- statements, self – defeating beliefs about money / gambling and related faulty thinking.
- Teach client self – management strategies such as self – monitoring and self – reward.

Note

It should be the concern of a therapist to ensure that any substance abuse that may be coexisting with pathological gambling (addiction) is treated.

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BY

STEPHEN KAMORE