

The Relationship Between Internet Gambling & Mental Health – Overcoming Barriers to Treatment.

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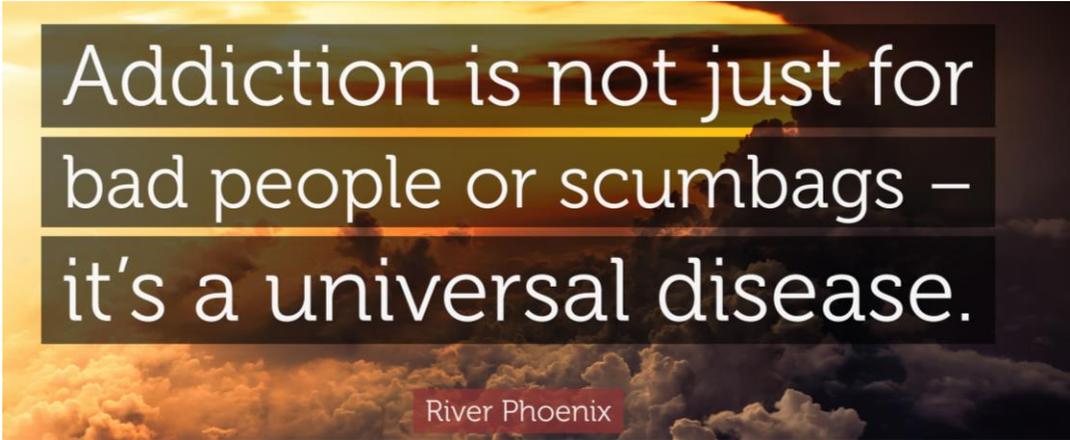
COUNCIL ON COMPULSIVE GAMBLING OF NEW JERSEY



Overview

- The Psychology of Addiction
- What is Internet Gambling?
- Internet Gambling vs Internet Gaming
- Dangers of Internet Gambling
- Relationship Between Internet Gambling and Mental Health
- Barriers to Treatment
- The Role of Advertisements in Internet Gambling
- Online Strategies to Reduce Harm
- A Public Health Approach to Addressing Gambling Related Harm
- Questions and Answers

The Psychology of Addiction



Addiction is not just for
bad people or scumbags –
it's a universal disease.

River Phoenix

Any behavior is potentially an addictive one, in fact researchers believe that whenever a habit changes into an obligation, it can be considered as an addiction.

Excessive behaviors, such as video gaming, eating disorders, sports and physical exercise, media use, internet behavior, sex addiction, pathological working, and compulsive criminal behavior can all become addictions.¹

Six criteria for a behavioral addiction²

Salience: Domination of a person's life by the activity

Euphoria: A 'buzz' or a 'high' is derived from the activity

Tolerance: The activity must be undertaken to a progressively greater extent to achieve the same 'buzz'

Withdrawal Symptoms: Cessation of the activity leads to the occurrence of unpleasant emotions or physical effects

Conflict: The activity leads to conflict with others or self-conflict

Relapse and Reinstatement: Resumption of the activity with the same vigor after attempts to abstain, negative life consequences, and negligence of job, educational or career opportunities



Inside the brain of a gambling addict



What is Internet Gambling?

Internet gambling refers to the range of wagering and gaming activities offered through Internet-enabled devices, including computers, mobile and smart phones, tablets and digital television.

Research suggests that people who gamble online do so because

- It's convenient and constantly available
- Greater value for money
- Greater variety of games
- Anonymity
 - Ability to play for uninterrupted periods
 - Reduced stigma
 - Increased feelings of comfort / less inhibiting
 - Greater sense of perceived control
 - Reduce social barriers to engaging in gambling



What is Internet Gaming?

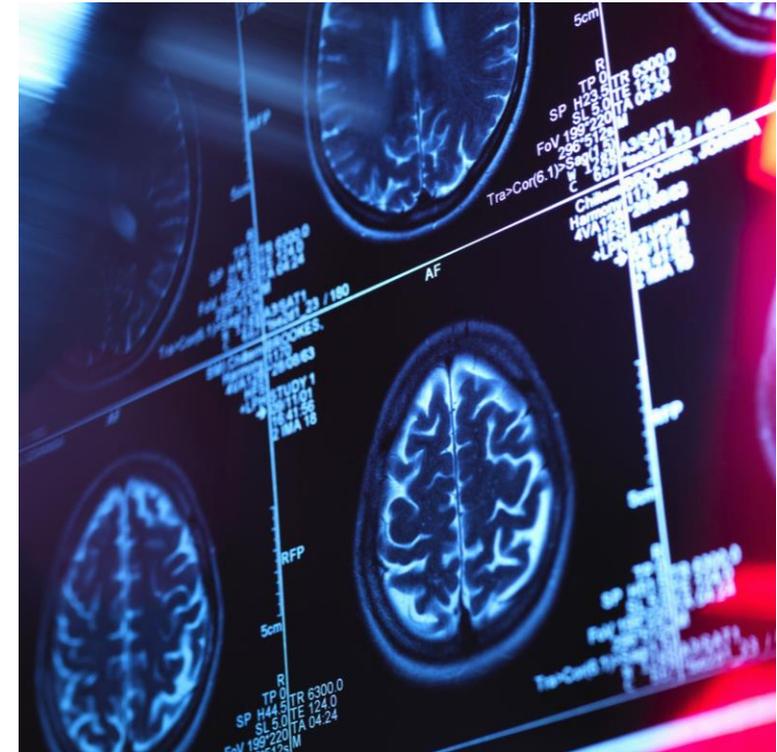
Internet gaming refers to all game types (both gambling related and non-gambling related, including the wagering of real money, virtual money, or no money wagering), which are played online (including through a social network/media platform played solo or multiplayer) via a computer, a laptop, a game console, a tablet, a mobile phone, or any other digital device that has internet access and game play capabilities.

Internet Gambling Disorder vs Internet Gaming Disorder

DSM -5 does not differentiate in the definition of gambling disorder based on a physical location or online activity. There is however a difference between Gambling and Internet Gaming Disorders.

Gambling disorder involves repeated problematic gambling behavior that causes significant problems or distress. It is also called gambling addiction or compulsive gambling.⁴

Internet gaming disorder (IGD) is defined as “persistent and recurrent use of the Internet to engage in games, often with other players, leading to clinically significant impairment or distress.”⁵



Internet Gambling Disorder vs Internet Gaming Disorder

-Classification

Gambling disorder is recognized in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) under the “Substance-Related and Addictive Disorders” category.⁴

Internet gaming disorder (IGD) is considered a serious public health concern⁶ and is recognized in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) as a possible candidate for future inclusion in the addiction's category.⁴



Internet Gambling Disorder vs Internet Gaming Disorder

Internet Gaming Disorder

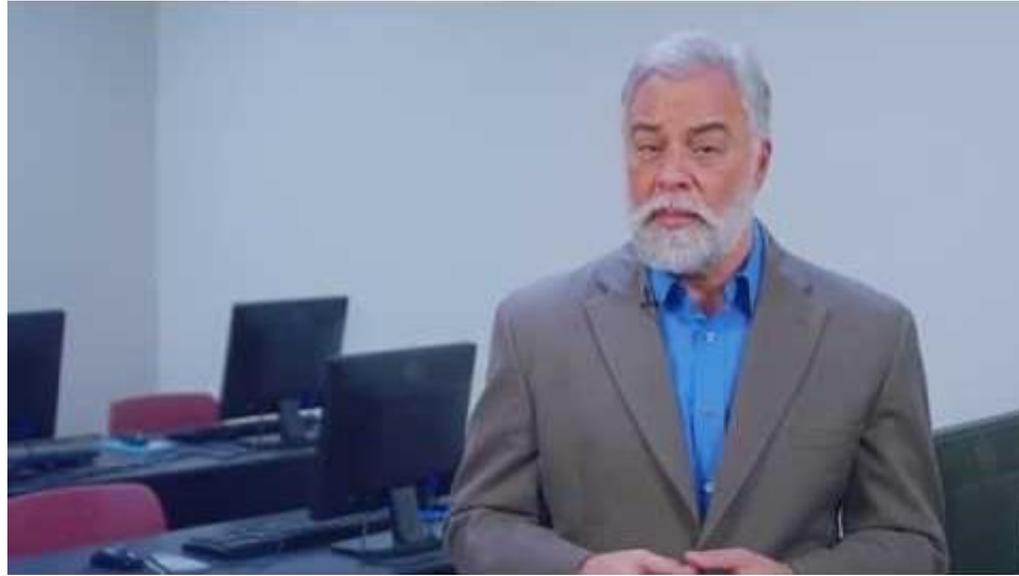
Individuals are more likely to⁷

- Males
- Younger (ages 12 – 20)
- Single
- Unemployed
- Lower age of disorder onset
- Lower somatization scores
- Lower depressive scores
- Lower prevalence of tobacco, alcohol and substance use
- Higher food addiction scores
- Higher body mass index

Internet Gambling Disorder

Individuals are more likely to⁸

- Males
- Young (ages 18 – 30)
- Single
- More likely to be educated and employed*
- Frequent gamblers and engage in a greater number of gambling activities including land-based games
- In higher debts
- Lower prevalence of tobacco, alcohol, and substance use*
- Engage in co-occurring risky behaviors
- Report more health, psychological & problems gambling*
- Less likely to recognize their problems or seek treatment



Dangers of Internet Gambling

How Internet Gambling Affects Health

- ❖ Increased self – isolation and mood disorders
- ❖ Increased poor physical health - more likely to have a physical disability
- ❖ Sleep deprivation
- ❖ When minors are involved in internet gambling, they are in particularly susceptible period for developing addictive behaviors or other mental health disorders.
- ❖ Participation in live action sports betting (also known as in-play) is an independent predictor of internet problem gambling severity,

Relationship between Gambling and Mental Health

Individuals with gambling disorder have been found to be 30 times more likely to have multiple (three or more) other lifetime psychiatric disorders compared to those without gambling disorder.

74% of this comorbidity precedes and may be a risk factor for the development of a gambling disorder rather than a gambling disorder serving as a risk factor for the development of other psychiatric disorders.⁹

Similarly, gambling is associated with mental health disorders sometimes as the cause and other times as the result of an untreated mental health disorders. Researchers have suggested that one of the precursors of behavioral addiction is the presence of mental health disorders such as depression, substance dependence or withdrawal, and social anxiety.¹⁰

Relationship between Gambling and Mental Health

Some of the most common mental health disorders associated with gambling include

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Bipolar disorder
- Mood disorder – Antisocial Personality Disorder

Two other prevalent issues that might be connected to the gambler's mental status are

- Domestic Violence
- Suicide

Relationship between Internet Gambling and Mental Health

Research is yet to answer the question “does a gambler participate in internet gambling because he/she already is a problematic gambler, or is online gambling what causes the gambling-related disorder?”

Studies have found that internet gambling is positively correlated with the development of gambling-related disorders.¹¹ Therefore it is reasonable to conclude that mental health is a major risk factor in an internet gambler experiencing a gambling disorder.

Additionally, online gamblers are more likely to be engaged in a greater number of gambling activities and the greater the level of involvement, the greater the potential losses sustained and the greater the emotional distress and mental health issues experienced.¹²

Why Don't Problem Gamblers Seek Treatment?

Presence of Co-Occurring Psychiatric Disorders

- A. Gambling is not the PRIMARY issue causing the problem.
- B. Co-Occurring disorders such as alcohol, depression, or bi-polar may make gambling more appealing by providing an escape.
- C. PTSD clients may prefer to use gambling as a coping mechanism.
- D. Problem or Disordered gamblers tend to exhibit anti-social behaviors or personality tendencies that lend itself to isolation, withdrawal, and alienation.
- E. Gambling can be a 'last-ditch' option for 'excitement' and 'fun' for someone in recovery from a substance.

Why Don't Problem Gamblers Seek Treatment?

Challenge to Identity and Resistance to Change

- A. Changes are related to gambler's thoughts, behaviors, and emotions.
- B. Intermittent rewarding outcomes are difficult to abandon.
- C. It is their sense of purpose and identity providing fun and excitement.
- D. Realization of wasted time, energy, money, and personal losses (relational, emotional)
- E. How does a problem gambler re-define themselves?



The thresholds for gambling disorder (4 of 9 criteria) is much higher than that of substance use disorders (SUDs; 2 of 11 criteria) and will likely underestimate the relative prevalence and impact of gambling disorder. The implication here is that some people might not be getting the treatment they need.

Barriers to Treatment

- ❖ Lack of availability of treatment providers
- ❖ Lack of transportation access to treatment providers
- ❖ Shame/Embarrassment
- ❖ Stigma
- ❖ Privacy
- ❖ Denial
- ❖ Lack of screening, especially in primary care
- ❖ Incessant advertising
- ❖ Limited online intervention or treatment options

The Role of Advertisements in Internet Gambling

Internet gambling is marketed in complex and varied ways.

Promotional marketing can include inducements such as sign-up bonuses, deposit bonuses, cash back, free gambling credits to new and/or established customers and celebrity brand ambassadors.

Promotional techniques used include broadcast advertising on TV and radio, online pop-ups on Internet sites, direct and third-party email and SMS and they aim to trigger actions.

Embedded advertising can be particularly powerful because very little can be avoided by skipping through or muting advertisements and it is likely to evoke an emotional rather than rational response.

Research into gambling advertising suggests it can shape gambling attitudes, intentions and behaviors, and impacts most negatively on existing problem gamblers and children, adolescents and young men.

Impacts of Gambling Advertising

Most of the environments in which participants reported seeing or hearing betting advertisements were not in environments specifically designed for betting.

Studies have shown that individuals with a gambling disorder are disproportionately influenced by gambling marketing.

Advertising typically depicts gambling as exciting, glamorous and skillful, promising easy financial and social rewards.

Youth and problem gamblers appear to be especially influenced by gambling advertising.

Bonus offers for sports betting appear to particularly increase Internet gambling among problem gamblers.

Gambling advertising to date has not been found to motivate many people to commence gambling; however, it can increase gambling among existing gamblers. It also reinforces inaccurate beliefs about gambling and normalizes betting.



Impacts of Gambling Advertising

Inducements were also linked with feelings of greater control over betting outcomes and stimulated some individuals to sign up with more than one betting provider

Gamblers report influence from promotions in the form of increased gambling involvement, reduced perception of risk, and increased impulsive betting.

An online survey of internet gamblers found that: “compared to all other gamblers, problem gamblers were significantly more likely to gamble online because of advertising

In one study, treatment-seeking gamblers reported that promotional marketing triggered gambling sessions and undermined efforts to reduce or stop gambling.

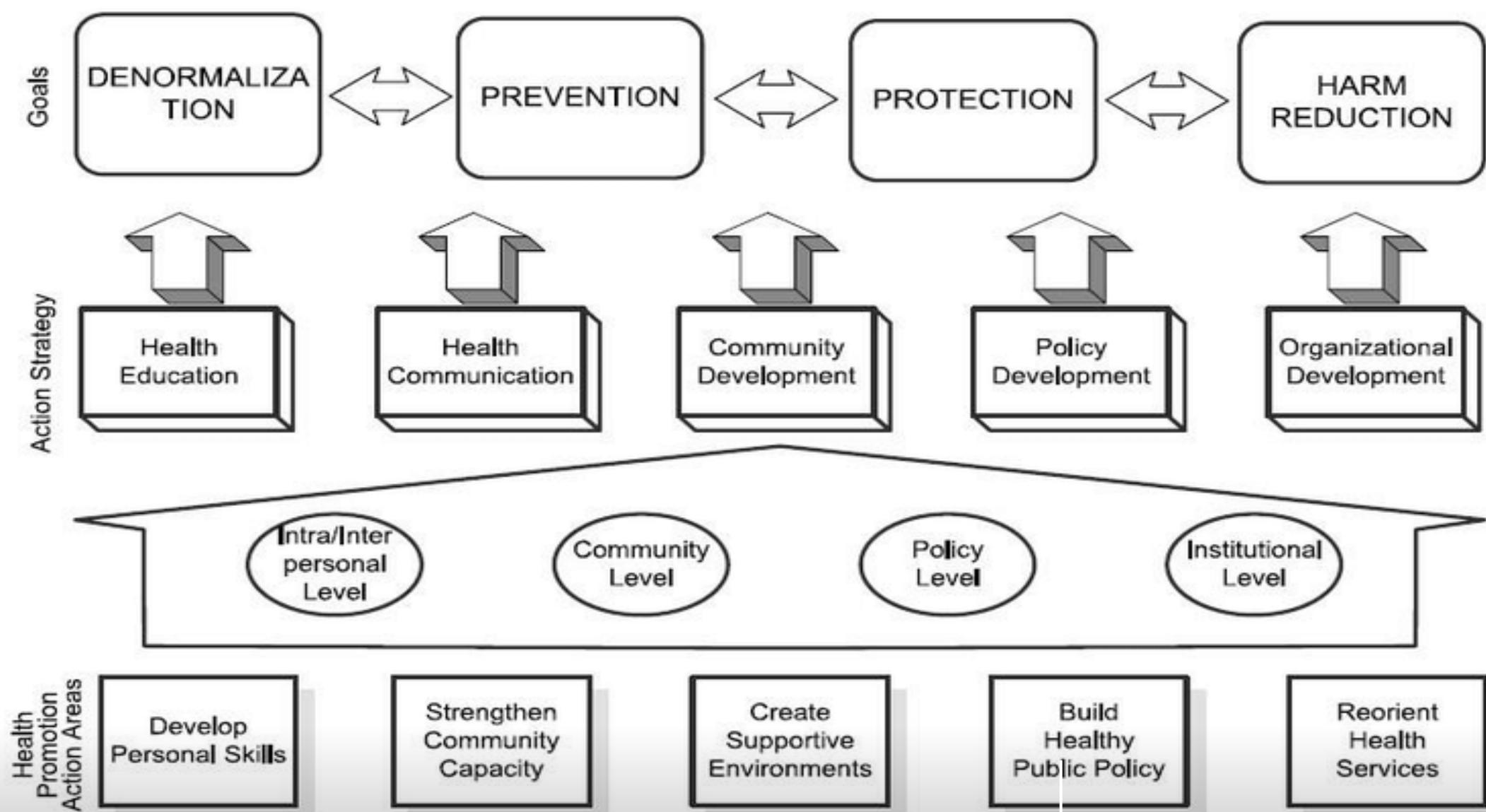
Promotions were further reported to lead to longer gambling sessions through increased availability of gambling funds.

Online Strategies to Reduce Harm

- ❑ Limit Setting
 - ❑ Time – Daily, Hourly, Weekly
 - ❑ Money – Loss Limits, Deposit Limits, Restricting access to money
- ❑ Time Outs
 - ❑ On screen clocks
- ❑ Self Exclusion
- ❑ Age Verification Checks
- ❑ Brief Intervention – Brief Biosocial Gambling Screening question/messaging on responsible gambling as popups
- ❑ Personalized feedback on individual gambling behavior
- ❑ Changing the parameters of rewards/loyalty points
- ❑ Restricting Advertising
- ❑ Online Therapy Availability

A Public Health Approach to Addressing Gambling Related Harm

- ❖ Price and Taxation Regulation
 - ❖ Maximum bet allowances especially for internet gambling
 - ❖ Taxation on wins for land-based venues. Caution on illegal gambling
- ❖ Regulating gambling content
- ❖ Regulating packaging and labelling
- ❖ Education, communication, training and public awareness
- ❖ Advertising, promotion and sponsorship
- ❖ Demand reduction measures
- ❖ Regulating Accessibility
- ❖ Research, surveillance and exchange of information



Public Health Policy Framework for Action

Source: Messerlian, Derevensky & Gupta (2005)

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