Clinical and Behavioral Evaluation of Pathological Gambling in Barcelona, Spain

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This paper assesses both the clinical characteristics and gambling behavior of 45 pathological gamblers (40 male, 5 female, average age 41) in a psychiatric hospital in Barcelona, Spain. These pathological gamblers tend to have other addictions and psychiatric disorders in addition to their pathological gambling. Suicidal ideation and attempts were one of the most frequent complications with these patients. Slot and fruit machines were found to be the most preferred form of gambling. Loans and crime were frequently used by the gambler to finance his or her gambling. Nevertheless, the...
gambler is rarely aggressive, and legal problems resulting from serious crimes are the exception. The profile presented is similar to that found among pathological gamblers in other countries.

INTRODUCTION

Pathological gambling is a disorder which is attracting more and more interest from health professionals, especially in those countries where gambling has been legalized and where it is a popular and socially accepted activity. Estimates concerning the prevalence of this disorder in the U.S. run from 0.77% in 1974, to 3.4% in 1985 (Commission on the Review of the National Policy Towards Gambling, 1976; Sommers, 1988). This justifies the attention which has recently been directed toward this disorder and which has resulted in the proliferation of treatment programs for pathological gambling.

The profile of the pathological gambler in the 1970's was characterized by a person aged between 41 and 50, male, married, with an average education, and employed who told lies persistently to hide his gambling behavior and who had been, as a general rule, exposed to gambling since early childhood (Nora, 1984).

The most preferred forms of gambling among male pathological gamblers in the U.S. are: horse races, sports betting, and cards and dice (Nora, 1984); whereas females prefer cards, slot or poker machines, horses and lotteries (Lesieur, 1988).

The pathological gambler has been described as showing a number of different psychosomatic symptoms such as digestive disorders, headaches, arterial hypertension, etc. (Lorenz and Yaffee, 1986; 1988).

Gamblers tend to consult mental-health professionals more often than the general population, and tend to present psychiatric disorders, especially major depressive disorder, hypomanic disorder, alcohol abuse and panic disorder (McCormick, Russo, Ramirez & Taber, 1984; Linden, Pope & Jonas, 1986). In addition, the rate of suicide attempts is high among pathological gamblers (Custer and Custer, 1978).

Deterioration of family life is usually evident in the gamblers' history, with a high incidence of separation and divorce compared to the general population (Kallick, Suits, Dielman & Hybels, 1979). They also show physical violence within the family nucleus and approx-