Pathological Gamblers in Methadone Treatment: A Comparison Between Men and Women

Barry Spunt
*John Jay College of Criminal Justice/CUNY*

Henry Lesieur
*Illinois State University*

Hilary James Liberty
*National Development and Research Institutes, Inc.*

Dana Hunt
*Abt Associates*

This article uses data from interviews with 462 individuals enrolled in methadone treatment programs in New York City to compare the gambling and gambling-related drug use and criminal activities of those males (N = 72) and females (N = 27) found to be pathological gamblers. Both the male and female pathological gamblers were and continue to be actively involved in various forms of gambling. A greater proportion of males had engaged in almost all specific types of gambling, although differences between males and females were not all statistically significant. Males and females were very similar in terms of their patterns of drug and alcohol use and the substances they

This study was supported by grant 1RO3-DA08548, 'Prevalence of Gambling Problems Among Methadone Patients', from the National Institute on Drug Abuse, awarded to National Development and Research Institutes, Inc. Points of view or opinions in this report do not necessarily represent the official opinions or policies of the United States Government, National Development and Research Institutes, Inc., John Jay College of Criminal Justice/CUNY, Illinois State University, or Abt Associates. The authors wish to thank Leila Cahill and Michelle Silverman for their assistance with this research.

Send reprint requests to Barry Spunt, Department of Sociology, John Jay College of Criminal Justice/CUNY, 445 W. 59th Street, New York, NY 10019.

© 1996 Human Sciences Press, Inc.
used when gambling. Males and females shared some reasons but also had separate reasons as to why they used heroin when they gambled. Males especially may participate in a variety of criminal and hustling activities to have the money to be able to gamble or to pay gambling debts. The implications of this research are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Although most pathological gamblers are men, the number of women is on the rise (Johnson, Nora and Bustos, 1992; McAleavy, 1995). While research has documented that there are differences in gambling attitudes and behaviors between men and women (Abbott and Cramer, 1993; Bruce and Johnson, 1994), the vast majority of research studies on pathological gambling have focused on male subjects, and gender-related findings are typically not reported. The underlying assumption seems to be that what is true for male pathological gamblers holds true for females (Mark and Lesieur, 1992).

It is not surprising, therefore, that little is known about the ways in which male and female drug abusers who are also pathological gamblers are similar and different. This is important because pathological gambling may compound the already high costs of drug abuse in different ways for male and female drug abusers. Gambling may accelerate and produce differing problems for males and females which will precipitate a return to using drugs for those who have quit (Ramirez, McCormick, and Taber, 1984; Lesieur, Blume, and Zoppa, 1986; Lesieur and Heineman, 1988). For the drug abuser enrolled in a drug treatment program, pathological gambling may present a barrier to rehabilitation, and effective ways to overcome this barrier may differ for males and females.

What is known is that gambling may be a common part of the regular activities of drug abusers, and that some drug abusers are able to support their habit through gambling or hustling at gambling games (Johnson et al., 1985). We also know that rates of gambling problems among substance abusers are higher than in the general population (Lesieur and Wallisch, 1993; see also Roehrich, Sorensen, and Good, 1994). Research done in the United States suggests that rates of pathological gambling are four to ten times higher for substance abusers than for the general population (Lesieur, Blume, and Zoppa, 1986; Lesieur and Heineman, 1988; Steinberg, Kosten and Rounsaville, 1992). We can presently assume that anywhere from 15 to 30 percent of substance abusers have gambling-related problems. Rates appear to be even