



<http://www.diva-portal.org>

This is the published version of a paper published in *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being*.

Citation for the original published paper (version of record):

Svensson, O. (2011)

Gambling: Electronic friends or a threat to one's health and personal development?

International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being, 6(2): 7207

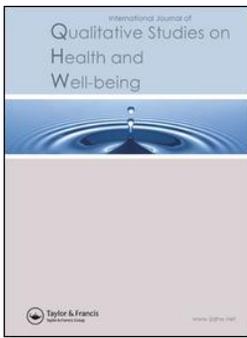
<https://doi.org/10.3402/qhw.v6i2.7207>

Access to the published version may require subscription.

N.B. When citing this work, cite the original published paper.

Permanent link to this version:

<http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:hh:diva-18884>



Gambling: Electronic friends or a threat to one's health and personal development?

Ove Svensson

To cite this article: Ove Svensson (2011) Gambling: Electronic friends or a threat to one's health and personal development?, International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being, 6:2, 7207, DOI: [10.3402/qhw.v6i2.7207](https://doi.org/10.3402/qhw.v6i2.7207)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.3402/qhw.v6i2.7207>



© 2011 Ove Svensson



Published online: 20 May 2011.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 209



View related articles [↗](#)



Citing articles: 3 View citing articles [↗](#)

HEALTH AND LIFESTYLE

Gambling: Electronic friends or a threat to one's health and personal development?

OVE SVENSSON

The Centre for Research on Welfare, Health and Sport (CVHI) and the Centre for Welfare and Wellbeing (V&V), Halmstad University, Halmstad, Sweden

Abstract

Gambling has become quite common in Sweden. The Swedish National Institute of Public Health (2010) has reported that about 70% of the Swedish population has gambled at least once during the last 12 months. Half of the population had gambled with money by 18 years of age and about 11% had gambled for the first time when they were 12-years-old or younger. In the report from the Swedish National Institute of Public Health, gambling problems are related to health problems and risky alcohol consumption. The highest problem rate is found among men aged 18 to 24; almost 1 in 10 had some gambling problems. The share of problem gamblers is found to be twice as high among the under-age gamblers as it is among the population as a whole. Young people gamble less but develop gambling problems to a larger extent than adult gamblers. In this article young people's gambling and their gambling careers are analysed as a natural part of their internalisation of other adult habits.

Key words: *Gambling, gambling problems, young people*

(Published: 20 May 2011)

Gambling has reached such an extent that young people's gambling cannot be seen to be an expression of deviant behaviour. The Swedish National Institute of Public Health (2010) has reported about widespread gambling throughout the entire population. The development of young people's gambling careers could be described as a walk along a corridor that is lined on both sides with different rooms— or social arenas—where they could choose to stop, open a door and proceed into the room, or just walk on by. The first room is for everyone in the family. In this room, above all else, the foundation for the young people's emotional relationships to gambling is laid during the primary socialisation. Later on during the secondary socialisation, when persons other than the parents are of the greatest significance, a development toward more specific gambling behaviour occurs. In addition to the problems that also affect adults, excessive gambling during adolescence can even become a threat to the self-reflective process of becoming an adult that begins during childhood.

Young people's gambling is affected by a number of conditions such as the accessibility of gambling,

the marketing of gambling, and the development of new forms of gambling. But their gambling is also affected by factors such as gender, ethnic background, education, occupation, and the parents' social and financial situation (Jonsson et al., 2003).

With Giddens's concept of *telescopic actions* (Svensson, 2005) we are able to understand how different chains of decisions and their consequences together reach far into the future, well beyond each individual action. These telescopic actions and decisions shape the young people's gambling and their gambling problems.

For someone in the beginning or the middle of their gambling career it can be difficult to develop an overview of the whole process and discern how and when the gambling problems arises (Griffiths, 2002). A common explanation is therefore that "it just happened."

Three young people's stories

Maria, Adam, and Greger are three young people that spend a large amount of their time gambling. They gamble on scratch cards, the football pools,

sports odds, various parlour games, internet poker, and slot machines. They mention that they also enjoy playing video games, games of strategy, and role-play games such as World of Warcraft online. They do not draw any firm line between the various forms of gambling. Gambling is seen to consist of social activities that one partakes of in front of the television, at the pizza parlour, in front of the computer at one another's houses, or over the Internet. Even if gambling is viewed as a social activity, both Adam and Greger admit that, on certain occasions when they are gambling intensively, they prefer to gamble on their own without the participation of their friends. Greger describes his attitude as follows:

I prefer to be alone when I gamble. If the others (his friends) are present and taking part in the gambling then I cannot relax in the same way. We can bet on the football pools and the like together, but if I am going to play blackjack or roulette then I go out on my own. If I have company with me then I only gamble for a couple of hundred Swedish kronor ...

Maria, Adam, and Greger all started gambling before they were into their teens. Maria, who is 17, describes how she started gambling and the relationship that she has to gambling:

I don't remember when I gambled for the first time, but I do remember ... I guess I was about ten years old ... we children were each allowed to pick out a horse in a race for our father. I was totally crazy about horses at the time, and all I ever read were books about horses. He placed the bet but I was allowed to pick the horse ... it had some sort of foreign name. It was like something from out of a book. I was certain that it was going to win, although it didn't ...

...Sure I gamble sometimes. Occasionally I will get some scratch cards, if Mum is paying for them, but otherwise I don't gamble that often. We usually talk about what we would do with the money if we won the biggest prize. It would be fun to collect a big win ... imagine getting 25,000 Swedish kronor every month for the next few years. Now that would be something ... although the chances of winning are so small.

Gambling that nourishes dreams

Maria associates gambling for money with positive memories from her childhood, but the gambling itself does not seem to hold any particular

significance for her. She is not looking for excitement or other experiences in the actual gambling. For her, gambling is not an end in itself, but merely a temporary way to pass the time that gives rise to daydreams. Her thoughts focus on how the money that can be won would change her and her mother's lives. Gambling on slot machines does, however, provide her with a totally different type of experience then when she gambles on scratch cards and instant lottery tickets. The fast pace of the slot machines both exhilarates and frightens her. She experiences how easy it is to get swept away by gambling on the slot machines, but also how quickly one can lose money.

Maria's daydreams can be compared to the pleasures that consumers, according to Campell (1987), indulge themselves within the modern society of consumerism. The abundance of goods and products on offer invite more or less unlimited fantasies of excessive consumption. However, Maria seems to maintain a healthy distance to her dreams and to have a firm grip on reality. She realises that the chances of winning money are limited, although this does not prevent her from temporarily fleeing from reality and daydreaming about how a large win would change her situation.

The gambling experience in focus

Adam, who is 19, has a complicated relationship to his gambling compared with Maria. It is more the experience of gambling rather than the actual win that motivates him to gamble with money. He likes to bet on horse racing and sporting events, but his favourite form of gambling is Jack Vegas and gambling on the Internet. He tells of how he sometimes goes to a place during the afternoons where he can gamble uninterrupted on two slot machines at the same time. It increases the pace of the gambling and shortens the time between wins, which intensifies the actual gambling experience. The excitement is kept going by the new stakes he wagers.

The money won contributes to making the gambling exciting, but the actual gambling experience depends just as much on the losses. The gambling experience is a consequence of the tension created during the gambling—believing that one will win despite the uncertain outcome—and the feeling of exhilaration and excitement that exists in a trembling moment of uncertainty before the result of the gamble is determined.

Adam tells of how he tries to change his gambling. However, he is not prepared to refrain from gambling completely. Instead he has tried to limit his gambling with the help of a set of rules that he is to

adhere to. He admits that he still invests a lot of money and time into all sorts of gambling, including gambling on the Internet, sports odds, and slot machines.

Adam also feels that socialising with his friends contributes to his gambling. Almost all of his friends share his interest in gambling, even though not all of them gamble as often as he does. They sometimes play poker together for money but never involving any large amounts.

Adam does not talk about his gambling at home. Even though his parents are most likely aware that he gambles, they have not been informed as to the extent of his gambling:

They don't know anything at home. If they were to find out how much money I gamble with it would lead to a fight. I had borrowed money from a friend, and when I didn't repay him his parents rang. Mum paid back the money, but after that they don't like the fact that I gamble. That was a while ago. Now I never gamble for more than five hundred (Swedish kronor) at a time, and I never borrow money. Even if I often win, I still lose money in the long run. I'm aware of that. That's just the way it is. But when I'm having a hot streak I can continue to gamble for a long time before the money runs out. I feel really good at times like that...

In Adam's case, money is converted into gambling time during the gambling situation. The critical aspect for him is how long he is able to gamble with his money. The money thus loses its nominal value as measured in Swedish kronor. Gamblers describe this as being afflicted by a kind of "speed blindness." When they are under the influence of this speed blindness, money is viewed purely as a means to continue gambling (Svensson, 2006).

The Russian author Fjodor Dostojevskij (1821–1881) describes this phenomenon in his novel entitled *The Gambler*. The main character, Alexej, gambles at roulette in a feverish, trance-like state whereby one bet follows the other without any particular pause for thought. He feels like he is floating freely above the roulette table and viewing the ongoing roulette play as if in a dream. Even before the ball has come to a stop in the roulette wheel, he is certain that he will win. This description is most likely based on Dostojevskij's own experiences of gambling. Ironically, the monies raised by the novel *The Gambler* rescued him from the threat of personal bankruptcy due to his gambling debts (Dostojevskij, 2003).

Controlling the gambling through one's own rules

Gambling for money takes many forms. That which Maria views as a temporary means of passing the time took on such proportions for Adam that it became something of a problem. In order to limit his gambling he introduces certain rules of conduct. He imposes a maximum limit for gambling of 500 Swedish kronor per day. When tradition or ingrained patterns of behaviour no longer impose limits on our cravings, the individual person is forced to do it himself/herself.

Modern society offers an abundance of opportunities for a moment's pleasure, but excesses run the risk of leading to problems. In the media we are able to read and hear about these excesses such as gambling obsessions, eating disorders, addiction to sex, addiction to television, addiction to alcohol, and addiction to computers. The common basis for all of these conditions is to be found in a more or less compulsive repetition of intensive and, in many cases, anxiety-reducing behaviour and actions.

However, as Giddens (1995) points out, people are never totally enslaved by their cravings, but rather they always have the possibility to act differently. In Adam's case this means that he tries to limit his gambling by imposing personal rules of conduct.

When gambling takes over one's everyday life

Greger, who is 19, tells of how he sometimes gambles away more money than he had intended and that his gambling has caused arguments with his parents. One reason for the arguments is that he spent the previous school semester gambling instead of going to school, which meant that he was forced to drop out of school. Apart from the fact that he fell out with his parents, his girlfriend grew tired of his gambling. He has no work at present, but he is looking for a job. Despite the negative consequences that his gambling has caused, he finds it difficult to stop gambling. Greger describes the disturbing emotions that he feels inside when he is forced to refrain from gambling:

... One time when I didn't have any money it felt awful ... so I filled in a load of betting coupons, on football, horse racing ... the works, and even though I couldn't afford to actually pay for the bets it still felt a little better. It's like something inside of me lets go when I gamble ... everything that I have been thinking about just disappears. More than anything I would like to move out of my parents' house, but that costs money.

Greger tells of how he often feels down in the dumps and ill at ease. For him, gambling is a way to influence how he feels. His malaise dissipates through the actual gambling itself, but even thanks to something else that is related to this. A lot of time is spent planning the bets and following the news about horse racing and sport in the media. That provides structure to his day during periods of unemployment.

But the gambling also causes difficulties. Greger admits that his gambling has caused a number of negative consequences, but he does not see himself as being addicted to gambling or as having any gambling problems. However, the instrument that is used in order to measure gambling problems provides a different view of his situation. The results indicate that he has gambling problems.

Gambling as a traditional phenomenon

Maria's, Adam's, and Greger's gambling appears to be something of a paradox. It is apparent from the interviews that all of them are losing more money than they are winning, however that does not prevent them from continuing to gamble. However, their motives for gambling are different.

Maria says that she lacks motive to change her gambling. The gambling provides her with entertainment for a while and she is of the opinion that she can afford it. Additionally, her mother pays for some of her gambling. The situation is quite different for Adam and Greger, both of whom have incurred debts on account of their gambling. They name the debts as a motive for continuing to gamble—they see gambling as just about the only way to obtain sufficient money in order to put their personal financial situations into order.

Despite many contradictions, it is possible to view gambling as a rational phenomenon. Theories suggesting that we gamble in an unconscious and destructive attempt to lose are a part of the mystifications that surround gambling. Reith (1999) points out that it is the chance of winning, at least on the next round of betting, that makes gambling rational, not the chance of losing. It is because of this chance of winning that we are prepared to bet money on an uncertain outcome, even though probability indicates that we will not win. Even if the losses dominate the wins, there is always that chance that we will win on the very next bet. Furthermore, the memory of special occasions when we have won seems to linger, while a long series of losses is quickly forgotten (Wagenaar, 1988).

An overview of the emergence of gambling habits

In order that the young people's gambling can be deemed to be habitual, it must continue for a certain amount of time. The young people's own overview of their gambling habits varies. Maria views her gambling as the result of prevailing conditions and deliberations. For her, gambling is a spontaneous activity and a consequence of momentary impulses. She does not feel the need to analyse it in more detail. There are, however, aspects of her gambling that she does reflect upon. When she plays bingo with her mother she is, for instance, often drawn toward the "Vegas gamblers" that are to be found at the slot machines. As soon as she reaches the entrance to the bingo hall, the neon sign displaying "Miss Vegas" attracts her. She feels that gambling on the slot machines provides her with a totally different experience from when she plays bingo or buys scratch cards. It is more intense and varied. Even though she wins a fair amount of money during an evening, she still gambles away far more than she had intended.

A person that feels that they have a reason to question their gambling is in all likelihood more motivated than others when it comes to trying to gain an overview of their gambling. While Maria feels that she lacks any such reason, Adam and Greger both seem to have cause to reflect over their gambling. Both report negative consequences from their gambling, even though neither of them views this as an expression of an addiction to gambling or gambling problems. They are more than happy to talk about their gambling, but they lack conviction when they say that they would like to change it.

Adam, however, unlike Greger, does try to limit his gambling; although neither of them is prepared to stop gambling. Apart from the fact that gambling plays a central part in their lives, it is viewed as a way to win back previous gambling losses. Furthermore, both have experienced large wins previously and believe in the possibility that they will win again. They do win money on occasions, but not enough so as to be free of their debts. Consequently the money they win is reinvested in new rounds of gambling.

Gambling—lifestyle and identity

Lifestyle is an expression for how people choose to shape their lives based on their life situation, identity, and social class. Young people's lifestyles are given visible expression in the form of clothes, hairstyles, musical tastes, and eating habits but also in their gambling. Naturally, a lifestyle lasts for a

certain length of time, but it is reshaped every day in connection with the young people's decisions about what they wear, what they eat, and how they behave in different contexts. Lifestyles are influenced by socio-economic conditions, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, but also by peer pressure, personal role models, risk assessments, self-esteem, and belief in one's own ability to manage one's life (Svensson & Hallberg, 2010).

Gambling influences the young people's lifestyle and identity

Lifestyles do not, however, only fulfil the need to make one's values and attitudes visible. They also encompass one's self-identity. When young people shape their identity, they are answering the eternal question of youth: who am I? In the post-traditional society, the answer to this question is not necessarily a product of the attitude of the parents. When the influence of family and traditions over young people's living patterns and identities starts to weaken, the young people become vulnerable to influences from global media, television, advertisements, films, the music industry, the Internet, and other channels through which the messages of consumerism are communicated.

The gambling industry is no exception, and it communicates with young people on several levels in the same way that Coca-Cola, McDonalds, Nike, and other commercial parties do. On a superficial level this can involve associating one's trademark and products with excitement, amusement, and fun. But at a deeper level it can involve communicating how these products can influence young people's self-esteem and well-being. By using the message "13 correct on the pools is more than just luck," the television advertisements for the Swedish football pools are targeting gamblers that believe that they are more skilled than others. This attitude is common among gamblers that gamble often and for large amounts of money and that consequently represent an interesting target audience for the gambling industry.

Electronic and virtual friends

Maria, Adam, and Greger spend a large amount of their time gambling. They gamble with money on slot machines, but they also spend time playing video games, games of strategy, and role-play games such as World of Warcraft online. Their gambling seems to be influenced by their search for belonging and fellowship. The longing to escape the demands of everyday life causes them to search for fellowship at the slot machines, computers, and

other "electronic friends" in whose company they can indulge in the pursuit of excitement and thrilling experiences. Mark Griffiths (1995a, 1995b, 1998, 2002) uses the concept of *technological addiction* together with gambling addiction in order to describe how gambling problems arise among this youthful generation.

However, empirical support for the concept of addiction to the Internet is weak. On the other hand, it is well documented that gambling on slot machines and games that are distributed via the Internet can be problematic. Both Jack Vegas and Internet poker are reported as being among the more problematic forms of gambling by those who ring in to the Swedish domestic support line. It is mainly young men that are seen to have gambling problems on account of these forms of gambling. Furthermore, it is reported that casino games on the Internet have contributed to gambling problems among young women (Swedish Support Line Annual Report, 2008).

When gambling is launched on the Internet it is set free from its social context and thus even from the social control otherwise provided by the surrounding environment. On the Internet this social control is replaced by the gaming companies' anonymous, but at the same time, more intrusive monitoring of all of the gambler's activities on the gaming site: choice of forms of gambling, the amounts of money that the gambler invests each time he or she bets, the correlation between wins and losses, as well as how the person's gambling develops over time. It is still unclear what responsibility the gaming companies have in relation to these observations. The gaming companies' image, profitability requirements, and consideration for the gamblers' personal integrity are offset against the needs for checking the age of the gamblers, interventions, and setting limits for the gambling.

Young people's gambling careers

It would be wrong to describe young people's gambling careers as if they followed a certain pattern. There are many different gambling careers and they develop in different ways; but that does not prevent the possibility of discerning the common features that can be found in the various gambling careers.

Maria, Adam, and Greger were introduced to gambling in the presence of their parents and brothers and sisters. They all started to gamble before they had entered their teens. According to most studies, an early gambling debut bears a correlation to increased risk for gambling problems.

The first phase of the gambling career—gambling within the family

In the first phase of the gambling career, the young people's gambling develops within the family and under the supervision and control of the parents. However, the most significant contribution that the parents make during this phase is not the transfer of knowledge and abilities but rather their attitude to gambling itself. In Maria's case, the participation of her parents in the gambling entails a form of emotional support for her own gambling. The effect on her gambling career is that Maria associates her later gambling with positive experiences from her childhood.

The second phase of the gambling career—gambling with one's peers outside of the family

Young people increase the extent of their gambling with their peers at approximately the same time that their gambling with their parents begins to wane. Consequently, a second phase of their gambling careers begins, a phase that is beyond the full knowledge and immediate control of their parents.

For the young people, their choice of form of gambling becomes an indicator that is demonstrative of their development towards a more grown-up lifestyle and identity. The gambling thus often changes from, as an example, betting on the football pools and scratch cards, to gambling on slot machines, or playing card games (Fisher, 1993).

Teenage girls develop their gambling within the family environment to a greater extent than boys. It is possible that this contributes to the girls' more restrained and careful approach to gambling. Girls also have greater respect for age limits than boys. This means that the gambling problems encountered by Swedish women are still mainly dependent on their fathers', husbands', or sons' gambling (Svensson, 1999).

Boys on the other hand are already using socialisation environments outside of the family home during their teens. During the second phase of the gambling career, their gambling develops to a large extent out of the time they spend with their similarly aged peers during school breaks, at the workplace, or at friends' homes. It is in these socialisation environments that the gambling starts to take on a more personalised form with specific patterns of gambling appearing (Fillmore, 1988; Fisher, 1995). The time spent with their peers is also a time when the young people shape their lifestyle and their identity as independent individuals free from the influence of their parents. They reflect each other and learn to handle close relationships with other companions of a similar age.

Gambling is also influenced by changes in conditions during one's childhood. For instance, changing to a new high school can lead to changes in a young person's gambling behaviour—especially if the new school happens to be situated next to a pizza parlour where the main attraction is a row of slot machines.

Schoolwork, with its strong emphasis on the future, has difficulty in competing with quick forms of gambling whose focus is on present-day experiences. Additionally, gambling meets young people's need to manage certain difficulties during their childhood. It can develop into a long-term strategy in order to manage school burnout, conflicts with one's parents, and the stress that many young people feel. Such a strategy does, however, run the risk of making everyday life even more empty and mundane.

The third phase of the gambling career—adult habits in commercial environments

During the third phase of young people's gambling careers, their gambling coincides with the final stage of their development into adulthood. This phase takes place to a large extent in commercial environments. Many young people are at this time attracted to the adult world's entertainments such as pubs, pizza parlours, discos, and restaurants, as well as slot machines and parlour games such as blackjack and roulette. When they are old enough, many also visit the casinos that have been built in the Swedish cities of Malmö, Gothenburg, Stockholm, and Sundsvall. Others might prefer the environment offered by the country's many horse racing tracks.

During the third phase of the gambling career, the young people test out the abilities and behaviour that they have previously observed and practised at the arenas of the adult world. They learn and refine specific knowledge and abilities relating to various forms of gambling. This learning process occurs in the company of colleagues at workplaces, where many employees are interested in certain forms of gambling, or else when spending time together with one's life partner who has experience of certain forms of gambling.

Different occurrences influence the young people's gambling. For instance, getting married and having children is an indication of adult status and increased social responsibility. This normally contributes to a more careful approach to gambling. Conversely, occurrences such as winning a large amount of money early in one's gambling career can lead to increased gambling and can result in gambling problems later in life (Abbott & Volberg, 1992; Custer & Milt, 1985).

Trying to stop or limit one's gambling

Due to a lack of longitudinal studies, our knowledge about how gambling varies over time is limited. There has not been a great amount of research conducted into how the natural recovery replaces periods of excessive gambling, nor how the gambling subsides when it loses its power of attraction or when other activities take its place. Instead, the gambling career is usually described as a fated "journey" toward all the more excessive gambling and increasing gambling problems. Each step in the gambling career is deemed to inexorably push the gambler nearer to the chronic state of addiction that is viewed as the journey's ultimate destination.

Custer and Milt (1985) divide their classic depiction of the gambling career into different phases referred to as "the winning phase," "the losing phase," and "the desperation phase." This classification brings meaning to the authors' clinical analysis. Sooner or later the losing phase follows the winning phase. If the losses incurred during this phase are significantly large, the gambler may no longer be able to see any means of escape from his or her situation. Thereafter follows the desperation phase and it is at this time that the gambler seeks help. However, young people's gambling careers seem to have a more varied pattern of evolution and their gambling appears to be much more susceptible to change.

Young people run a greater risk of having gambling problems

Young people's gambling leads to problems more quickly than is the case for adults. It is deemed to take between 3 and 4 years of excessive gambling before adults develop gambling problems, but the process occurs much more quickly for young people. Rossow and Hansen (2003) point out that gambling on slot machines can lead to gambling problems among young people after only 6 months.

Not only do young people develop gambling problems more quickly than adults, they also run a greater risk of having gambling problems. This relationship can be explained by a more youthful and carefree attitude to life: "To dare to take risks, to live in the present, to trust one's luck and to not care about the future, these are all typical characteristics of a typical youthful attitude to life [...] For most people this attitude eventually changes to a grown-up, long-term and careful life strategy" (Andersson, 1991, pp. 120–121). The greater risk of having gambling problems might also depend on the young people's choice of forms of gambling. It seems that young people prefer slot

machines, Internet poker, and other similar risky forms of gambling to a greater extent than adults.

Young people's gambling problems are not as constant

Young people may develop gambling problems more quickly and to a greater extent than adults, but their problems do not, however, seem to be as constant in nature. Nor is the same terminology used for young people's gambling problems as for the gambling problems experienced by adults. Rachel Volberg (2001), for instance, points out that, from a psychiatric point of view, it takes time to develop chronic and pathological gambling habits, and it is improbable that such a development can already take place during a person's teenage years.

In my dissertation (Svensson, 2005) I show that young people's gambling problems are susceptible to change over time. A number of young people that had gambling problems no longer exhibited any gambling problems after 2 years. This finding was later confirmed by Lars Westfelt (2006). Consequently, young people appear to get out of their problems more quickly than adults, even if they must attempt to do so several times before they finally succeed.

However, this does not mean that young people's gambling should be trivialised in any way. Their gambling can lead to serious consequences both for themselves and for their relatives. It can lead to worsened performance at school, the incurrence of debts, worsened relations with friends, conflicts with parents, depression, malaise, suicidal thoughts, and even suicide.

Even though young people might not have debts that are as large as adults' debts, the debts they incur on account of their gambling are often significant. A contributing factor to this situation has been the increasing availability of instant SMS loans with high rates of interest, but even normal bank loans that are ostensibly arranged for the purchase of cars, apartments, furniture, and other such items can instead be used to pay for gambling activities. It is only when the total level of debt becomes overwhelming that the true extent of the young people's gambling becomes known.

Willingness to change the gambling behaviour

I have noted that many young people that gamble a lot are willing to limit their gambling, even if the predominant attitude among the young people is that there is no point in worrying about their gambling (Svensson, 2005). However, the lack of involvement from the municipal authorities with regard to young people's gambling problems most

likely means that the young people's interest in changing their gambling behaviour is not picked up. There is often a lack of knowledge about gambling and gambling problems among the professional groups that come into contact with young people at schools, recreational centres, social services, youth clinics, and centres for child and adolescent psychiatry. Relatives admit that there are many times that they feel that they are left to deal with the problems on their own. This strain means that the relatives often display similar psychosomatic symptoms to those that are normally associated with gambling problems (Jonsson, 1994).

Young people seldom receive any treatment for their gambling problems. For those that do receive treatment, the treatment is most often a part of treatment they are receiving for other problems such as criminality, difficulties with reading and writing, or psychological problems. Receiving treatment for gambling problems at a treatment centre does not appear to be an alternative for young people as long as most Swedish municipalities and county councils refuse to pay for it. Although some programs that are underway with group therapy, family therapy, courses for relatives, and individual therapy in the large Swedish cities of Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Malmö have shown good results, only a few of these addresses the problems of young people under 18-years-old (Hansen, 2006).

Conflict of interest and funding

The author has not received any funding or benefits from industry to conduct this study.

References

- Abbott, M. W., & Volberg, R. A. (1992). *Frequent gamblers and problem gamblers in New Zealand: Report on phase two of the national study*. (Research Series No. 14). Wellington: New Zealand Department of Internal Affairs.
- Andersson, B. (1991). *Understanding drug addiction. The practice, the situation, the process*. Lund: Arkiv förlag.
- Campell, C. (1987). *The romantic ethic and the spirits of modern consumerism*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Custer, R., & Milt, H. (1985). *When luck runs out*. New York: Facts on File.
- Dostojevskij, F. (2003). *The gambler*. Lund: Bakhåll.
- Fillmore, K. M. (1988). *Alcohol use across the life course: A critical review of 70 years of international longitudinal research*. Toronto: Addiction Research Foundation.
- Fisher, S. (1993). The pull of the fruit machines: A sociological typology of young players. *Sociological Review*, 41(3), 446–474.
- Fisher, S. (1995). The amusement arcade as a social space for young people. *Journal of Adolescents*, 18, 71–86.
- Giddens, A. (1995). *Modernity and self-identity. Self and society in the late modern epoch*. Gothenburg: Daidalos.
- Griffiths, M. D. (1995a). *Adolescent gambling*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Griffiths, M. D. (1995b). Technological addictions. *Clinical Psychology Forum*, 76, 14–19.
- Griffiths, M. (1998). Internet addiction: Does it really exist?. In J. Gackenbach (Ed.), *Psychology and the internet, intra-personal, interpersonal, and transpersonal implications* (pp. 61–75). San Diego: Academic Press.
- Griffiths, M. D. (2002). Fruit machine addiction in an adolescent female: A case study. *Journal of Gambling Studies*, 9, 4, 387–399.
- Hansen, M. (2006, October). Treatment of problem & pathological gambling in the Nordic countries: Where we are now and where do we go next? *Journal of Gambling Issues*, 18. Retrieved April 15, 2011, from <http://www.camh.net/egambling/issue18/pdfs/hansen.pdf>
- Jonsson, J. (1994). *Rien ne va plus* [to be a close relative of a gambling addict]. The Psykological department of Stockholms University. Stockholm: Stockholms University.
- Jonsson, J., Andrén, A., Nilsson, T., Svensson, O., Munck, I., & Kindstedt, A. (2003). Gambling addiction in Sweden. The characteristics of problem gamblers: Report from Phase II of the Swedish National Study on gambling and problem gambling. Report 2003:22. Stockholm: The Swedish National Institute of Public Health.
- Reith, G. (1999). *The age of chance. Gambling in western culture*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Rosow, I., & Hansen, M. (2003). *Entertainment with an aftertaste. Young people and gaming* (NOVA Report 1/2003). Oslo: Norwegian Institute for Research into Childhood, Welfare and Aging. Support line's annual report. Retrieved September 29, 2009, from <http://www.fhi.se/PageFiles/6437/A2009-3-Årsrapport-från%20Stödlinjen2008.pdf>
- Support Line Annual Report. (2009). The Swedish National Institute of Public Health. Retrieved September 29, 2009, from <http://www.fhi.se/PageFiles/6437/A2009-3-Årsrapport-från%20Stödlinjen2008.pdf>
- Svensson, O. (1999). *Women's relationship to gambling for money. Feminist perspective*. Gothenburg: Gothenburg University, Institute of Women's Studies.
- Svensson, O. (2005). *Young people's gambling for money. The gaming market, the situation and the career*. Lund: Lund University, Institute of Sociology.
- Svensson, O. (2006). Gambling and money. In T. Linné & M. Persson (Eds.), *Money—Man and his means of payment*, (pp. 150–180). Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Svensson, O., & Hallberg, L. (2010). The pursuit of health, wellbeing and quality of life. In L. Hallberg (Ed.), *Health & lifestyle—research and practical applications*, (pp. 35–51). Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- The Swedish National Institute of Public Health. (2010). *Gambling for money and gambling problems in Sweden 2008/2009*. (Report no. 3). Swedish Longitudinal Gambling Study. Östersund, Sweden: Swedish National Institute of Public Health
- Volberg, R. A. (2001). *When the chips are down. Problem gambling in America. A Century Foundation report*. New York: The Century Foundation Press.
- Wagenaar, W. A. (1988). *Paradoxes of gambling behaviour*. London: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Westfelt, L. (2006). *Two studies about gambling and gambling problems—A cross-sectional analysis and a longitudinal analysis about the risk for gambling problems*. SoRAD, (Research Report no. 34). Edsbruk: Akademytryck AB.