

GAMBLING & DISORDERED GAMBLING FACTS

Founded in 1983, the Massachusetts Council on Compulsive Gambling is a private, non-profit public health agency dedicated to reducing the social, financial, and emotional costs of gambling-related problems. The Council provides prevention, information, education, advocacy, and referral services for problem gamblers, their loved ones and the greater community.

TERMS: There are a number of terms used to define gambling and gambling disorders.

- **Gambling:** activities in which something of value is risked on the outcome of an event when the probability of winning or losing is less than certain.¹
- **Pathological gambling:** the American Psychiatric Association classifies pathological gambling as an impulse control disorder and defines it as the “persistent and recurrent maladaptive gambling behavior that disrupts personal, family or vocational pursuits” (p. 615).² **Compulsive gambling** is the original lay term for pathological gambling.³
- **Sub-clinical pathological gambling (i.e., problem gambling):** gambling behavior that does not necessarily meet the criteria for pathological gambling but results in harmful effects to a gambler, his or her family, significant others, friends, co-workers, and others.³
- **Disordered gambling:** a term used to describe the combination of pathological and sub-clinical pathological gambling.³

GAMBLING PREVALENCE RATES: Research has estimated the number of U.S. citizens who gamble as well as the number who experience pathological and sub-clinical pathological gambling.

- **Gambling rates:** research has estimated that nearly 80% of U.S. population has gambled during his or her lifetime.⁴
- **Pathological and sub-clinical pathological gambling rates:** research has estimated that approximately one half of 1% (0.42 to 0.6%) of the U.S. population have experienced pathological gambling in their lifetime, and 0.9 to 2.3% have experienced sub-clinical pathological gambling in their lifetimes.^{4, 5} *The Mass. Council recognizes that approximately 2-3% of the population has experienced disordered gambling in their lifetimes.*
- **Pathological and problem gambling in Massachusetts:** based on national estimates, between 85,000 and 185,000 Massachusetts residents likely have experienced disordered gambling during their lifetimes.^{4, 6}

WHO IS AT RISK FOR PATHOLOGICAL GAMBLING: Anyone can develop a gambling problem, regardless of age, gender, race, ethnicity, or socio-economic status. Though pathological gambling does not discriminate, research has shown that the following groups are more susceptible to gambling problems.

- Males^{4, 5, 7}
- Individuals who are widowed, separated or divorced⁵
- Individuals who begin gambling at a young age⁴
- Immediate family members of pathological gamblers⁸
- Individuals who are delinquent or commit illegal acts⁷

OTHER DISORDERS WITH PREVALENCE RATES SIMILAR TO DISORDERED GAMBLING: Research has estimated the lifetime prevalence rates of various mental health disorders and substance use disorders. Listed below are some disorders with lifetime prevalence rates estimates that are relatively close to the aforementioned 2-3% lifetime prevalence rate estimate of disordered gambling.

- Opioid use disorder (1.4%)⁹
- Cocaine use disorder (2.8%)⁹
- Amphetamine use disorder (2.0%)¹⁰
- Anti-social personality disorder (3.6%)¹⁰
- Obsessive-compulsive disorder (1.6%)¹¹
- Schizophrenic disorders (0.6%)¹²
- Anorexia nervosa (0.6%)¹³
- Bulimia nervosa (1.0%)¹³

POTENTIAL CONSEQUENCES OF PATHOLOGICAL GAMBLING: Pathological gambling is associated with a number of negative consequences.¹⁴

- Family dysfunction and domestic violence including spousal and child abuse¹⁵⁻¹⁹
- Suicide, suicide ideation and suicide attempts^{15, 20-22}
- Significant financial troubles including bankruptcy, loss of property and poverty as a direct result of wagering²³⁻²⁶
- Criminal behavior ranging from prostitution and theft to drug trafficking and homicide^{24, 26}

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN GAMBLING, SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS, AND MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS: Pathological gamblers are significantly more likely to have mental health disorders and/or substance use disorders compared to those without gambling problems.^{4, 5} Research examining a large, representative sample of U.S. citizens found the following lifetime rates among pathological gamblers:

- **Substance use disorders:**
 - 75% had an alcohol disorder
 - 38% had a drug use disorder
 - 60% were nicotine dependent⁵
- **Mental health disorders:**
 - Nearly 50% had experienced a mood disorder (e.g., depression, bi-polar)
 - 41.3% had experienced an anxiety disorder (e.g., phobia, social phobia, generalized anxiety disorder)
 - 60.8% had experienced a personality disorder (e.g., antisocial, schizoid, obsessive-compulsive)⁵

SIGNS OF PATHOLOGICAL GAMBLING: People reporting **five or more** of the following experiences might meet the criteria for pathological gambling:²

- (1) *Preoccupation with gambling*
- (2) *Needing to gamble with increasing amounts of money in order to achieve the desired excitement*
- (3) *Repeated unsuccessful efforts to control, cut back, or stop gambling*
- (4) *Restless or irritable when attempting to cut down or stop gambling*
- (5) *Gambling as a way of escaping from problems*
- (6) *After losing money gambling, often returning another day to get even ('chasing' one's losses)*
- (7) *Lying to family members, a therapist, or others to conceal the extent of involvement with gambling*
- (8) *Committing illegal acts such as forgery, fraud, theft, or embezzlement to finance gambling*
- (9) *Jeopardizing or losing a significant relationship, job, or educational or career opportunity because of gambling*
- (10) *Relying on others to provide money to relieve a desperate financial situation caused by gambling*

HELP FOR THOSE WITH GAMBLING PROBLEMS:

Help for people experiencing problems with gambling, their family members, and the greater community is available:

- The Massachusetts Council on Compulsive Gambling operates a free, confidential Helpline (800-426-1234) and website: www.masscompulsivegambling.org. In addition, the Mass. Council trains clinicians and maintains a list of professionals who have earned their Massachusetts Problem Gambling Specialist Certificate (MAPGS).
- The Massachusetts Department of Public Health funds treatment centers throughout the state.
- Many people experiencing problems with gambling join Gamblers Anonymous (GA) or Bettors Anonymous (BA).
- Spouses, significant others, and family members of people experiencing problems with gambling can attend Gam-Anon, a fellowship that meets to share experiences about living with a disordered gambler.

For more information or to have a packet of materials sent to you, please call the Mass. Council Helpline (800-426-1234), the business line (617-426-4554), e-mail the Council at gambling@aol.com, or visit 190 High Street, Suite 5, Boston, MA 02110-3031.

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