

FACTS ABOUT DISORDERED GAMBLING

THE MASSACHUSETTS COUNCIL ON COMPULSIVE GAMBLING:

Founded in 1983, the Massachusetts Council on Compulsive Gambling is a private, non-profit health agency dedicated to providing leadership to reduce the social, financial, and emotional costs of problem gambling, and to promote a continuum of prevention and intervention strategies including: information and public awareness, community education and professional training, advocacy and referral services for problem gamblers, their loved ones and the greater community.

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
- **Problem gambling (i.e., sub-clinical pathological):** 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}

OTHER DISORDERS WITH PREVALENCE RATES SIMILAR TO DISORDERED GAMBLING:

The 2-3% lifetime prevalence rate estimate of disordered gambling is significant. Research has estimated the lifetime prevalence rates of other equally serious public health disorders. Listed below are some substance use and mental health disorders with rate estimates that are relatively close to the rate estimates of disordered gambling.

- Opioid use disorder (e.g., oxycontin, morphine): 1.4%⁷
- Cocaine use disorder: 2.8%⁷
- Amphetamine use disorder (e.g., methamphetamine): 2.0%⁸
- Anti-social personality disorder: 3.6%⁸
- Obsessive-compulsive disorder: 1.6%⁹
- Schizophrenic disorders: 0.6%¹⁰
- Anorexia nervosa: 0.6%¹¹
- Bulimia nervosa: 1.0%¹¹

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^{4,5,12}
- Race/ethnicity (African American, Native American, Asian American)¹³
- Individuals who are widowed, separated or divorced⁵
- Individuals who begin gambling at a young age⁴
- Immediate family members of pathological gamblers¹⁴
- Individuals who are delinquent or commit illegal acts¹²

POTENTIAL CONSEQUENCES OF PATHOLOGICAL GAMBLING:

Pathological gambling is associated with a number of negative consequences.¹⁵

- Family dysfunction and domestic violence including spousal and child abuse¹⁶⁻²⁰
- Suicide, suicide ideation and suicide attempts^{16,21-23}
- Significant financial troubles including bankruptcy, loss of property and poverty as a direct result of wagering²⁴⁻²⁷
- Criminal behavior ranging from prostitution and theft to drug trafficking and homicide^{25,27}

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*

HOW DOES DISORDERED GAMBLING IMPACT SPECIAL POPULATIONS?

Adolescents / College Age

- Nearly 70% of U.S. adolescents between the ages of 14 and 21 gambled in the past year.^{28,29}
- Over 10% of U.S. adolescents between the ages of 14 and 21 gambled twice a week or more in the past year.²⁸
- Research has shown that those who gamble at a young age are more susceptible to gambling problems.^{28,30}
- Adolescents with a family history of gambling problems are more likely to experience problems with gambling.³⁰
- Compared to college students without gambling problems, college students with gambling problems are more likely to:
 - Use tobacco³¹⁻³³
 - Use alcohol, drink heavily or binge drink, get drunk³¹⁻³³
 - Use marijuana or other illegal drugs^{31,32}
 - Drive under the influence³⁵
 - Be arrested for non-traffic offenses³²
 - Binge eat^{31,32}
 - Have a low GPA³²
 - Experience depression and stress and consider and attempt suicide³³

Older Adults

- Among older adults, those who gamble 5 or more times in a year, are significantly more likely than their counterparts who have not gambled as frequently to also have mental health disorders and/or substance abuse problems.
- Compared to older adults who gamble 4 or fewer times in a year, older adult gamblers who do not gamble 5 or more times in a year are more likely to have nicotine dependence (17.0%)^{34,35} and alcohol use disorders (30.1%)^{34,35}

Corrections

- Among those in the corrections population, a meta-analysis reported that 33% of criminal offenders meet criteria for problem or pathological gambling.³⁶ Compared to other population segments, this represents a disproportionately higher rate.³⁶
- Approximately 50% of the crimes committed by incarcerated problem and pathological gamblers are committed to support their gambling.³⁶

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 visit www.masscompulsivegambling.org, 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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