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University

Stigma and help-seeking for gambling problems - November 2013 -

Summary of Findings -

The ACT Gambling and Racing Commission contracted The Australian National University's Centre for Gambling Research to undertake a study into the stigma associated with gambling problems and to better understand how stigma impacts on help-seeking.

The study used interviews with service providers who worked for health and welfare services in the ACT, people who played electronic gaming machines at least once a week, clients who attended health and welfare services in the ACT and who self-identified as having a gambling problem and problem gambling counsellors and financial counsellors from around Australia.

Key results

The key results of the study include:

- People with gambling problems experience stigma, however they were more likely to express this feeling as '*shame*', or with words such '*embarrassed*', '*guilt*', '*stupid*', and '*weak*'. Feelings of shame were a common reason given for not seeking help for gambling problems;
- People with gambling problems attempted to hide their gambling problem – even from themselves – to avoid feeling shame and stigma. It was also found that they tended to articulate their experience of stigma through discussing their fears of exposure, and the consequences of family and friends finding out that they have a gambling problem;
- Service providers believe that the general public have a negative view of people with gambling problems and this contributes to stigma;
- Gambling is widely promoted and encouraged despite being a potentially dangerous activity. Societal attitudes towards problem gambling can contribute to the stigma experienced by people with gambling problems;
- For some people, messages like 'gamble responsibly' can contribute to feelings of stigma, especially if they are having difficulty controlling their gambling behaviour.
- Problem gambling is not properly addressed from a public health framework. While treatment of alcohol and other drug problems are now considered issues of public

health rather than merely individual moral failings, this does not appear to be the case for problem gambling;

- People with gambling problems should be encouraged to view help-seeking not as an admission of weakness or desperation, but as a 'step of strength'. Promotion of specialist problem gambling services should emphasis problem gambling as treatable.

Support is available

Anyone experiencing problems with their gambling is urged to seek assistance. The Commission's problem gambling website provides information on responsible gambling, self help materials and links to help services at www.problemgambling.act.gov.au

Immediate and free assistance is available anytime by phoning Mission Australia on 1800 858 858 or through the national online help service at www.gamblinghelponline.org.au

Free tools to assist managing your gambling, including 'Stay on Track', are available for mobile and android devices at www.gamblinghelp.nsw.gov.au