

Strategies for Preventing, Reducing, Inhibiting or Abating Gambling-related Harms

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A Little (? Forgotten) History

- “Budd” and the 2005 gambling Act, enshrined in law, for the first time, an obligation to address problem gambling
- The third of the three objectives (protecting the vulnerable) has received by far the greatest amount of attention and generated by far the greatest amount of (so far inconclusive) controversy
- There was early recognition in Budd and subsequently that the best structure for addressing this issue would be one which promoted collaboration between regulators and industry rather than attempts at coercion by the former and resistance struggles by the latter
- This issued in an agreement that industry should fund and implement a comprehensive strategy for treatment, education and research under the auspices of the Gambling Commission, as advised by the Strategy Board
- (Education rather too narrowly taken to be the same as prevention but only a part of it)

How has this worked?

- Not too badly; nothing catastrophic; but could do better
- Especially in relation to the issue of “prevention” (by some distance the Cinderella of the three components of strategy) and to a lesser extent research
- The honourable (and universal) reason for this is that addressing issues like problem gambling is extremely difficult: it is difficult to know what the right things to do are in treatment, prevention and research and especially difficult to know whether you have been successful in doing them
- The less honourable (and universal) reason is that commercial gambling generates abnormally large profits (because costs are small and supply is restricted) and everyone wants to address problem gambling issues so as to maximise their share of this money: all sectors of industry, national and local governments, treatment and education/prevention service-providers, and researchers and consultants like me.
- But turf wars about money and power seem to have subsided

Three Elements of Good Prevention Strategy

- **GOOD LAW:**

Permissions and prohibitions: who (if anyone), can gamble when, where, on what, for how much, supplied by whom, at what price, at what tax or (quasi-tax) rate?

Always some - rarely total - prohibition on gambling depending on political processes and judgments.

- **GOOD REGULATION:**

Manage licensing processes; securing compliance with licensing objectives; responding to new developments by ingenious operators); collaborating with government and industry on reputation management issues; demonstrating its own cost-effectiveness

- **GOOD PUBLIC AWARENESS STRATEGIES ABOUT THE DANGERS OF GAMBLING EXCESSIVELY AND HOW TO AVOID THEM**

- Though many aspects of our law and regulatory arrangements seem to me to be in need of updating and reviewing, it is in the area of raising awareness that we can most immediately and least controversially start doing better

The Role of Promoting Awareness in a PG Prevention Strategy

- The most effective prevention strategy would be prohibition enforced by a slow and painful death penalty.
- However where an activity, enjoyed harmlessly by many but engaged in dangerously by a few, is offered legally to the public other prevention strategies are needed which show greater respect for individual freedom and responsibility:
- ***This is mostly a matter of promoting widespread awareness and informed choice***
- Especially when the biggest problem in treatment for all addictive and disordered behaviours is getting people to realise that they are behaving, or in danger of behaving, self-destructively and that they need and can get effective help
- So widespread awareness of the nature of problem gambling and what can be done about it should be at the heart of any comprehensive and effective problem gambling programme
- Very helpful, therefore, that RGT has become “GambleAware”

Promoting Awareness: The Moral, Political, Economic and Epistemological Contexts for Gambling Policy

- Morally defensible PG strategy will seek to secure the optimal balance (as in Budd) between consumer choice and consumer protection (player enjoyment and commercial success vs gambling-related harm; majority wishes vs individual freedom)
- An optimal strategy will be comprehensive and collaborative between government, industry and service providers, taking account of the needs and interests of all three but never subordinating these to the needs and interests of actual and potential PGs
- A profitable gambling industry is a GOOD THING (rewards the creativity of businesspeople, pays my pension, etc)

Provided:

-the profits come from successfully and fairly competing for the opportunity to satisfy consumer preferences and not from force or fraud, (including monopolistic or collusive pricing, predatory marketing etc)

- everything that reasonably can be done, is in fact done to avoid horrible, uncompensatable and incommensurable externalities such as ruined lives and gambling-related suicide.

- It is necessary for all parties to engage in “evidence-based decision-making” about what does and doesn’t work. But the evidence is rarely sufficient and needs to be supplemented by experienced-based judgment

The Need for Awareness: The USA Surgeon General's Report on Addiction (2016)

- (USA) Surgeon General's Report (2016): Only 1 in 5 alcohol and drug abusers seek treatment of the 1 in 10 of the population who need it
- But (USA) Epidemiological Survey of all addictions as well as depression and anxiety disorders shows that those who seek help are 5 times more likely to recover than those who don't
- Figures for UK are lower for gambling amongst the general population because fewer gamble on anything other than big prize lotteries
- But probably *similar proportions for regular gamblers as regular drinkers are vulnerable (or already wounded)*

Objectives of public awareness activities

To ensure that current and potential gamblers, those close to them and those responsible for their welfare (employers, doctors etc.) have an accurate understanding of:

- How gambling works and why people enjoy it, given that in the long run they're almost certain to lose
- What are the dangers of gambling excessively or compulsively
- How to avoid them
- Where people in trouble because of their gambling behaviour, as well as those who are affected by another's gambling behaviour, can get help

Content of gambling awareness programmes

Given, these objectives what should the content of the messages be?

- Gambling is about having fun (playing games, going on rides at funfairs); fuelling financial fantasies (what we'd do if we won a lottery); **not** making money.
- It can lead to ruination of gamblers' health, wealth and happiness as well as ruining the lives of others, especially loved ones – just like all other addictions
- It requires setting realistic limits to losses, to frequency of gambling and to time spent gambling – and sticking to them
- How to get free, confidential and expert help if you think you may want or need to cut down or stop or if you need help because someone close to you is gambling to excess (spouse, child, parent. Significant other)

Who should gambling awareness programmes be targeted at?

- Current gamblers
- Potential gamblers (esp the young)
- Affected and potentially affected loved ones
- Employers
- GPs
- CABs (Citizens Advice Bureaus)
- Police, Prison and Probation Officers
- Social workers and teachers
- Politicians and Judges
- Actually, *everyone*

How should people be made aware?

- Signage and leaflets for regular gamblers may have a small effect but above all training for all staff in identifying danger signals in customers and training for select staff in non-intrusive nudge techniques. (The SA suicide and why I am being sued).
- Schools Programmes in the life skills/orientation curriculum)most easily delivered online)
- Public Service Advertising: “If you or some close to you has a problem with gambling too much, get free, confidential expert help by calling ...
- Life/recovery coaches in large organisations to include to be aware of gambling-related harms and how to mitigate them
- Prof Dev training to include management of gambling addicts together with other addicts for all caring professionals likely not yet to know about gambling problems

Overlaps with treatment: the coaching model

- A life coach helps people identify what they want from their lives, what are the obstacles to their getting it, and how they can build on their strengths to overcome them: does not treat the sick, instruct the ignorant or counsel the foolish
- Hence anyone can learn to coach anyone else (and most of us can benefit from it one way or another)
- Early coaching type interventions before treatment by industry professionals, family members, counselling service providers, ministers of religion, friends (US Epidemiological Study and Surgeon General's Report on how addicts get better)
- Encourage people to seek treatment or to obviate the need for it
- Help reintegration into real life after treatment (relapse prevention)

What does it all cost? What are the benefits?

- Not a thumb-suck but a needs-driven budget
 - what are the things we need to do?
 - what is the least expensive way of doing them effectively?
 - so what are our priorities, given comparative costs and expected outcomes?
 - so how much can we reasonably expect the industry to fund as % of earnings (GGR/Y)?
- What does industry get for it?
 - At least a reputation for providing mostly harmless entertainment in a socially responsible way (so no punitive taxes, expensive, time-consuming regulation, etc.
 - At a best a reputation as a public benefactor

Thank you

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