

Problem Gambling in Europe

Challenges, Prevention, and Interventions

Gerhard Meyer Tobias Hayer Mark Griffiths **EDITORS**



Springer

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Foreword

JEFFREY L. DEREVENSKY

It should come as no great surprise that gambling is alive and well in Europe. Since the beginning of civilization, people have been wagering on the outcome of unpredictable events. Gambling was well known to the Babylonians, the Etruscans, the Romans, the Greeks, and the Chinese. Examples of early gambling have appeared in ancient art and literature and gambling was evident in the writings of Homer, Chaucer, and Shakespeare. While there is dispute as to who invented dice, most historians suggest that it was developed several centuries BC and was a favorite game in Europe. Similarly, there is no consensus as to the date and location of the development of playing cards. Both Venice and Spain have been cited as the birthplace because of its popularity among its citizens, yet there is evidence that France became Europe's leading manufacturer of playing cards during the 15th century (Fleming 1978).

Gambling has taken a prominent place in our history. The settling of America is replete with gambling stories. There is even speculation that one of the major disasters in American history, the devastating Chicago fire of 1871, may have begun because of gambling. While legend has it that Mrs. O'Leary was busy milking her cow one evening and the cow accidentally kicked the lantern, which started the fire in her barn, resulting in burning down most of Chicago, she later testified under oath that she had not been in the barn that evening at all but rather was sound asleep in her bedroom. Some 70 years later, a wealthy Chicago entrepreneur, Louis Cohn, left a bequest to Northwestern University accompanied by a document admitting that he and not Mrs. O'Leary's cow was responsible for knocking over the lantern that resulted in the great Chicago fire. He reportedly admitted accidentally knocking over the lantern in a moment of excitement while shooting dice with some friends in the barn. His explanation: "I was winning" (Fleming 1978).

The history of gambling includes royalty, Kings and Queens (not only on face cards), knights, noblemen, clergymen, pirates, and commoners alike. While some have suggested that gambling is the devil's invention, others have viewed it as an enjoyable recreational pastime.

The evolution of gambling, or gaming as it is often more recently commonly referred to, has seen many twists and turns. The chapters that follow in this book, representing countries throughout Europe, often include a historical context of gambling. Clearly evident in country after country, we see that the pendulum has moved from widespread legalization to prohibition and back again over time. Along this historical ride has come new forms of gambling, advances in technological games, the development of very sophisticated electronic gambling machines, and the widespread acceptance by the general population and governments.

The history of gambling has also seen many prominent, and not so prominent, players. In England, King Henry VIII once lost the largest and most famous church bells, the Jesus Bells that were in the tower of St. Paul's Cathedral, in a dice game (Fleming 1978). American gangsters Bugsy Siegal and Meyer Lansky were famous for turning a desert town—Las Vegas—into a gambling mecca while the wealthy were turning Monte Carlo into a gambling resort for the European rich and famous. Not to be outdone, sport celebrities and Hollywood entertainers have become the new “high rollers” along with politicians and successful businessmen.

In the past century, gambling has undergone a profound transformation in the types of games available, accessibility, widespread acceptance, and appeal. Once regarded as economically marginal, politically corrupt, and often morally dubious, it has now become widely accepted by society as a socially acceptable form of entertainment and a significant generator of revenues for both the industry (now large corporations with many properties) and governments (Reith 2003). In the past two decades, we have witnessed an enormous increase in the variety of gambling opportunities around the world, with Europe being no exception. Casinos run by mobsters in North America have been replaced by Boards of Directors of multinational corporations listed on stock exchanges in many countries.

While the growth of the industry has helped the economy and governments eager to raise revenues without direct taxation, there is ample evidence that it has not come without subsequent problems and social costs. It is important to note that the economic benefits and social costs associated with this increase in number of venues and accessibility have not been adequately assessed. Such social costs also encompass the human costs. Advocates for expansion have often lined up against those who have raised concerns around the social and human costs associated with excessive or problematic gambling. These social costs have been found among individuals, families, and communities, with special high-risk populations being identified as particularly vulnerable. The arguments proposed by the opponents of gambling expansion are that the human costs to the individual, their family, and their employer far outweigh any benefits that legalized state sponsored or regulated forms of gambling might bring, including entertainment to individuals as well as generating employment and tax revenues (see Collins 2003, for an excellent treatise of the arguments for addressing the social costs and benefits of gambling).

This book represents the first in-depth analysis of the current state of (problem) gambling across Europe. While this book will have widespread appeal to legislators, regulators, economists, academics, and members within the industry, the landscape of gambling is continually evolving. The European Union courts have multiple issues currently pending that will likely affect how gambling may be offered and regulated throughout Europe in the future. Only time will tell. Nevertheless, the pendulum does not appear to be reverting back to more restrictive curtailed forms of gambling but rather its continued expansion. Along with expansion have come more opportunities, easier accessibility, and innovation and growth within the gaming industry.

The past decade has witnessed not only unprecedented growth in the industry but a significant increase in research in understanding gambling behaviour, problem gambling behaviour, and ways to protect the public (responsible gambling measures). By some estimates, more than half the