



University
of Glasgow

‘Gambling Careers’ : a longitudinal, qualitative study of gambling behaviour

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NatCen

Social Research that works for society



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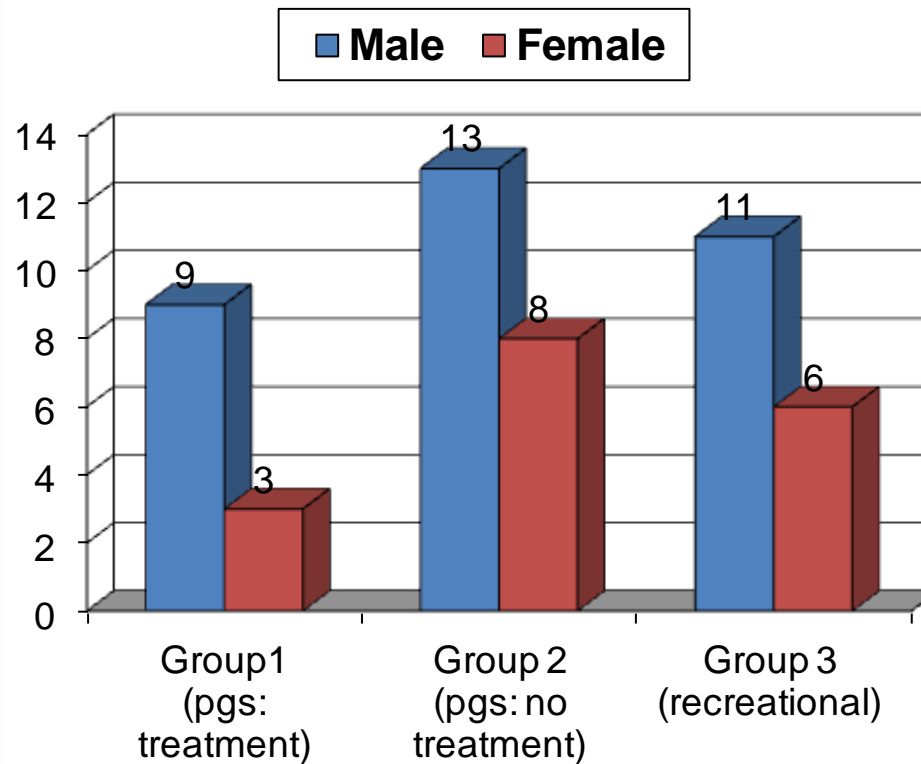
- Five year longitudinal qualitative study
- With National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) and Stirling University
- Funders: ESRC-RIGT

- Shift from dichotomous models → focus on fluid nature of gambling and natural recovery (Hodgins and el-Guebaly 2000)
- Models of ‘pathways’ and trajectories of behaviour over time (Blaszczynski and Nower 2002)
- Requires longitudinal research → shows variability of behaviour (Slutske, Jackson and Sher 2003; Wiebe, Cox and Falkowski-Ham 2003)
- Need for:
 - qualitative longitudinal studies
 - focus on social & environmental factors

- Objectives:
 - to investigate patterns of behaviour change over time
 - to explore the social dimensions of gambling
- Five year qualitative study (2006-2011)
- Cohort of 50 gamblers and problem gamblers interviewed 4 times
- Replicated in 3 year Danish study; young people aged 12 - 20

- Recruitment around Glasgow, U.K
- Gambling venues, treatment agencies, community venues
- Loosely structured interviews, approx 90 mins + NODS screen
- Analysis using ‘Framework’ software package
- Sample split into three groups

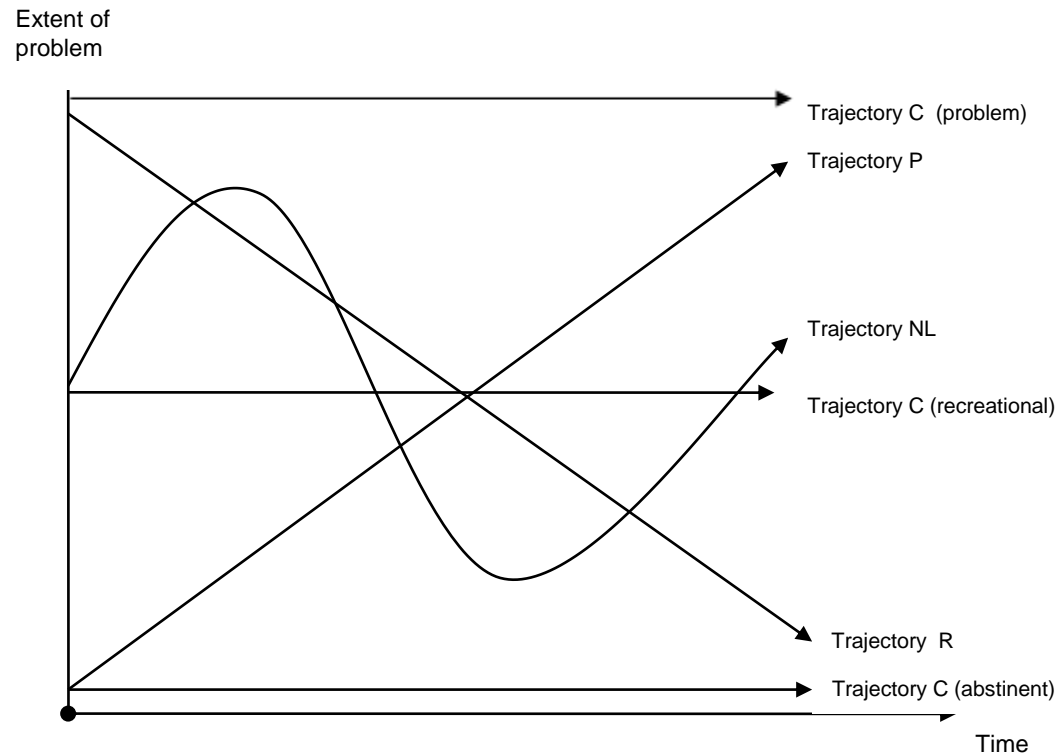
Classification of gamblers at first interview



Four trajectories

Progression ($n=8$)
Reduction ($n=3$)
Non linear ($n=18$)
Consistent ($n=15$)

Danish study: '4 pathways':
intensification,
reduction,
stability,
non-linearity



- Profile
 - Mainly initially recruited as recreational gamblers
 - Inconsistent patterns of employment
 - Machine gambling
- Themes
 - Significant life events
 - Bereavement, birth, caring roles, changing job, changing relationship
 - Alcohol (note geographical/ environmental aspect)

“I don’ t think it’ s a hidden factor I mean you just have to look at all the betting shops in Britain, right, they’ re always strategically placed about fifty yards away from a pub. I mean, we’ re sitting in a bookies right now [the interview was being conducted in a betting shop] - there’ s a pub on either side of us” (male, 20s)

- Changes in social & environmental networks
 - Moving home, changing job – physical proximity to gambling venues
 - Family, friends role in introducing &/or encouraging gambling
- Finances
 - Increased finances; e.g wages, credit
 - ‘Windfalls’
 - “I got £38,000 for the sale of my house, and I am now down to £9,000... the rest has went on gambling” (Female, 40s)

- ‘Escape routes’
 - Gambling to cope with stress, depression, loneliness
- Machine gambling
 - Beginning, or increasing play on, machines
 - Physical location/ convenience: eg FOBTs in betting shops; EGMs in bingo halls

- Profile
 - Mainly initially recruited as pg not seeking help
 - Stable employment patterns
 - Large no. respondents had reduced *periods* of gambling, but only 3 reduced *overall*
- Themes
 - Social & environmental networks
 - Moving away from gambling venues; losing contact with gambling networks, developing non-gambling relationships
 - “when I did go and look for a bookies, I couldn’t park [my car], so that [gambling] was out...”
(Male, 30s)

- Significant life events
 - Bereavement, birth, caring roles, changing job, changing relationship
- Finances
 - Decreasing income = decreasing gambling
 - Prioritising other expenditures

- ‘Maturing out’
 - Losing interest: age-related, and related to development new roles and identities (Winick 1962)
- Social support
 - Role of family & friends in reduction; e.g taking control of finances
 - “My mum had my [bank] cards and I got given £5 every day to get me to my work and my lunch, so for five months, that’s how I lived” (Male, 20s)

- Problematic (2)
- Recreational (3)
- Abstinent (10)

- Profile
 - End category same as starting category
 - Consistent employment (excluding problematic)

- Consistent: problematic
 - Only 2 out of an initial 33
- Consistent: abstinent
 - Gamblers Anonymous
 - Self-identified ‘addicts’ ; impossibility of controlled gambling
 - Counselling
 - Helped reduce gambling and maintain stability
 - Different experiences. E.g personal obligations with counsellor; short term utility during crisis

- Consistent: recreational
 - Social motivation
 - Control over money (‘pocket money’)
 - Individual control strategies

- Profile
 - Many initially recruited as problem gamblers not seeking help
 - Inconsistent employment patterns
- Themes
 - Is NL characterized by similar themes seen in P and R?
 - Largely, yes

- Periods of progression *and* reduction influenced by
 - Social & environmental networks; life events; finances
 - Alcohol, machines, escape
 - GA, counselling, social support

- But also distinctive features
 - Many were males, low SES, aged 35-55
 - Played machines in betting shops (FOBTs)
 - Illustration: unemployed male betting shop player, 30s
 - Periods of progression → ‘bingeing’ on FOBTs, esp during periods of depression/ boredom.
 - “there’s something about them; they just suck me in ... it’s as if they’re programmed for me”
 - Periods of reduction → helped by social support/ responsibilities and GA

- From 3 ‘groups’ of people to 4 trajectories of behaviour
- Change is the norm
- Very few gambled consistently problematically for 5 years; very few reduced overall, although many had *periods* of both.
- Consistent behaviour - but mainly abstinent
- Recreational players moved towards P or NL behaviour

- **Contra findings on natural recovery?**
(Hodgins and el-Guebaly 2000; La Plante et al 2008)
- **Contra ideas about controlled gambling?**
(Blaszczynski, McConaghy and Frankova 1991; Slutske et al., 2010)
- **Supports research on ‘episodic & transitory’ nature of problems over time**
(LaPlante et al 2008; Slutske, Jackson and Sher 2003; Abbott, Williams and Volberg 1999, 2004).

- Behaviour characterised by complexity and fluidity
- Significant themes:
 - P and NL: alcohol, machines, insecure employment
 - R and C: social support, stable employment
- Role of employment?
- Focus on patterns of behaviour rather than ‘types’ of gamblers
 - Behaviour as social & changeable, rather than dichotomous model (minority PGs v.s majority recreational gamblers)

- Reith, G & Dobbie, F (2011) Beginning gambling: the role of social networks and environment. *Addiction Research and Theory* 19 (6) 483-493.
- Reith, G & Dobbie, F. (2012) Lost in the game: narratives of addiction and identity in recovery from problem gambling. *Addiction Research and Theory* 20 (3)
- Reith, G & Dobbie, F. (2012) ‘Gambling careers’ : a longitudinal qualitative study of gambling behaviour *Addiction Research and Theory* 21(5), 376–390.
- Danish Study:
 - Kristiansen, S; Trabjerg, M and Reith, G (2015) ‘Learning to gamble: early gambling experiences among young people in Denmark’ *Journal of Youth Studies* 18 (2) 133-150
 - Kristiansen, S; Trabjerg, M and Reith, G (2015) “The notorious gambling class”: Patterns of gambling among young people in Denmark: a longitudinal qualitative study’. Submitted *Journal of Youth Studies*