



Family matters

Family members' experiences
with help and support

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So, things could have been better. Like having more focus on practicalities, but also , of course, I think I should have been offered some help on how to deal with it at an emotional level. Because as a family carer, you have to deal with the economical consequences that have been placed on you by someone you love, and you have to deal with it all, together with that same person.. and being able to deal with that.. I feel that I put all my feelings aside and just hung in there, until I was completely empty.

Prevalence

- 1,4 % of the population in Norway can be characterized as problem gamblers
- More men than women
- 6- 10 relatives are affected by one person's problem gambling
- Problem gambling is highly likely to affect living conditions and everyday life in families
- Living conditions and quality of life are related



Background for the study

- 2017 / 2018 – «It never really ends» – A qualitative study exploring living conditions and everyday life in families with gambling problems (Part I)
- The study revealed:
 - Lack of knowledge about problem gambling, in health services and in society at large
 - Problem gambling was experienced as extremely shameful for the family
 - Problem gambling had severe consequences for everyday life, especially related to economic difficulties, breach of trust and changed roles in the family
 - The need for more knowledge about families of problem gamblers, what kind of help they get, and what they experience as helpful support
- 2022 / 2023 – a Part II study was initiated and financed by the Norwegian Directorate of Health
- Conducted by Akershus University Hospital, in collaboration with Blå Kors, Korus Øst and Spillavhengighet Norge

Aim of the study

To explore how families of persons with gambling problems experience the help the families receive

- 1) What kinds of help did the families receive?
- 2) How does the help received relate to the important areas practical and economical help, treatment of the problem gambler help with family life and relations, and knowledge about problem gambling?
- 3) In retrospect, what do the families consider especially important support, in terms of obtaining a better everyday life and living conditions?
- 4) What kinds of help did the families wish they had received / what did they miss?



Method

Qualitative study:

A qualitative study with an explorative design

Generate knowledge through exploring subjective experiences

Rich and nuanced descriptions

Participants

8 female partners (all still in the relationship)

3 adult children

Recruited with the help of the NGO 'Gambling Addiction Norway'

Analysis

Thematic analysis (in process)



Qualitative interviews

- Semi-structured interviews with a thematic interview guide
- Focus in the interviews were on the help and support families had received and what kind of help they could have wished for
- Help and support was explored from the perspective of the family member, and how the help and support addressed and met the needs of the family.
- Participants chose where and how they wanted to be interviewed: Physical meeting, zoom or telephone
- Interviews lasted between 1 – 1,5 hours



Preliminary findings

- Several examples of helpful support – but many more on what the families would have wished for – but did not get.
- Help targeted towards the needs of the family members and the family as a unit was particularly scarce
- Important areas of help:
 - 1) Information and knowledge about problem gambling
 - 2) Help with relations and communication in the family
 - 3) The need for the family member for having one's own space

Information and knowledge about problem gambling

Meeting someone with knowledge about problem gambling was important, especially related to: Addiction, nuanced understanding, being a family carer, living with it, practical advice

Addiction

I feel that information about addiction, that would have been important, to understand his condition. There are so many things family carers need to think about, economics, all the practical issues. But to understand what addiction actually does to a person.

Nuanced understanding

Focus in these cases tend to be very much like “gambling obsessed woman gambled away everything”, I mean these stories can contribute to more shame, I feel there is a lot of negativity concerning gambling.

People don't know anything. How bad it actually is. I think that if my mother had been addicted to alcohol, we would have received more help and understanding, and maybe the family had not been split up, but people think it is something totally different.

Being a family carer

I wish someone had informed me, back then, about possibilities for treatment and help for families, I wish I had received information about that, I could really have needed it.

I think maybe they learn more about it in medical school now? My GP was helpful, whenever I am there, she asks me how things are going now and if I have the need for it, I can come and talk with her, whenever.

Living with it

The therapist we met in the family therapy service.. It is all about knowledge, you know, if you don't know how addiction affects a person, then it is perhaps difficult to understand that it is my husband's problem we need to work with, and not just my anger. They just focus on how we handle a stressful everyday life and that I get angry. But the probe of the problem is that I get angry because I can't trust him.

Practical advice

She told me that you have to take control over the household economy, because that is a basic thing one has to do, to rebuild trust, and he had said no, he wouldn't give me access to his account and all, and she said that if has trouble doing that, it is because he is still gambling. I hate that she was right.

Help with relations and communication in the family

Help with dealing with complicated feelings and reactions: Trust, doubt, sorrow, shattered dreams and changed roles

Trust:

I think that if he had said that he was going to join a support group or some kind of therapy without including me, it would have taken even longer, or maybe I wouldn't have trusted him at all. So I think it was really important that I was included, to build trust again. But it takes a long time. And sometimes, I can still be a bit sceptical, and it suddenly comes over me, what if I start checking his bank account again?

Doubt:

There should be some kind of family therapy. That you talk together as a couple, how can we handle this as a family (..) Talk with someone who has knowledge about gambling addiction and how it works, how the mind works, what happens when you gamble, why do they do it again, because you know, you can't help thinking, that if you do it again, do we (the family) mean so little to you? Is the gambling more important to you?

Sorrow:

What bothers me most, perhaps, is when I meet people today, like my fiancé and his family, or friends and their families and I see how a mother should have been, and that's the worst. Theoretically, I am the mother of my mother.. It kind of makes me a bit jealous, I just wish that I could have experienced a little bit of that.

Shattered dreams:

Thing is, there is nothing that he can do to help me, my dreams have been shattered, and I take that really hard. He can't fix that.

Changed roles:

Sometimes, I feel that he has become my child and I have to take all the responsibility for the economics, I have to make sure he doesn't gamble. I find it so demanding, that I am the only one responsible for making decisions.

The need for having one's ^{Intern} own space

The importance of being recognized as a person on one's own terms, with needs and resources: Be able to share experiences, be part of a community, having to be considerate, being recognized

Share experiences

The peer support group and meeting other family carers was really important to me, because they knew what I was going through and gave clear and good advice.

Community

To know that you are not alone. That people have the same experiences and that it is possible to move on and that things can actually get better.

Being considerate

I was in group therapy with him, but then I kind of felt sorry for him because I know how hurt he can get. So then, I just held back. Perhaps I shouldn't have.

Being recognized

Today, I have full control over my personal economy. Because I have learned what it is like not to have money because it has all been spent on gambling. So, you could say there is something positive in all the negative. That's just how it is.

Reflections

- Help and support offered is limited and individualistic, and not family-oriented
- It is often targeted towards specific, narrow and time limited goals, while family needs are diverse, complex and long-lasting.
- Family carers take on large responsibilities but receive limited support
- While acknowledging and supporting the difficulties the families experience is important, there is also a need to recognize and focus on resources, strength and coping
- There is a need for a widened approach, both in terms of help offered and the narratives that are told about problem gambling.



Plans

- Publish findings in report for Norwegian Directorate of Health and in scientific paper
- Collaboration with BlåKors (Blue Ribbon) and Korus Øst on larger project on problem gambling
- Apply for funding for larger study about families
- There is still a long way to go



Thank you for your attention

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