



*NATIONAL INSTITUTE
OF PUBLIC HEALTH – SWEDEN*

Gambling as a Public Health Issue



Gambling has many faces





The Swedish Public Health Policy

Aims and Objectives:

The overarching aim of Sweden's national public health policy is to:

"create social conditions that will ensure good health, on equal terms for the entire population"

But

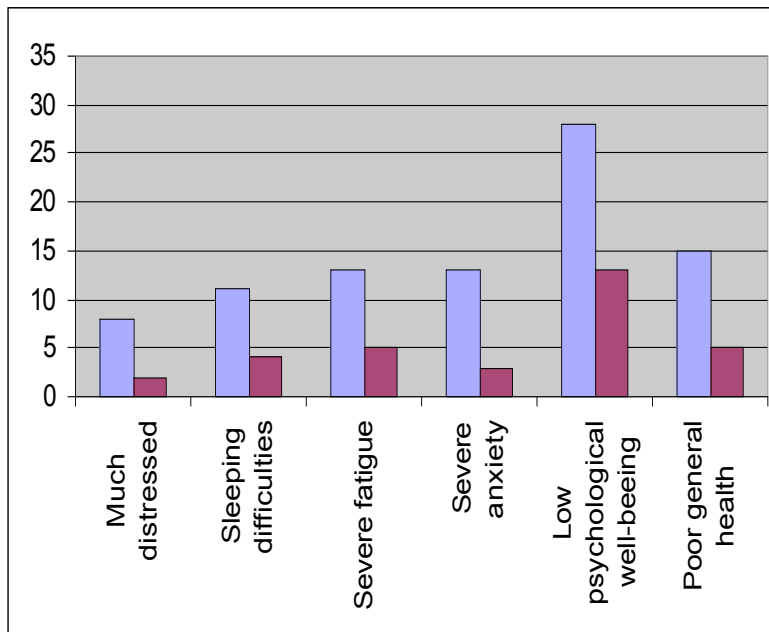
Problem gamblers have worse social conditions, more health problems and more economical problems than other gamblers and the population as a whole



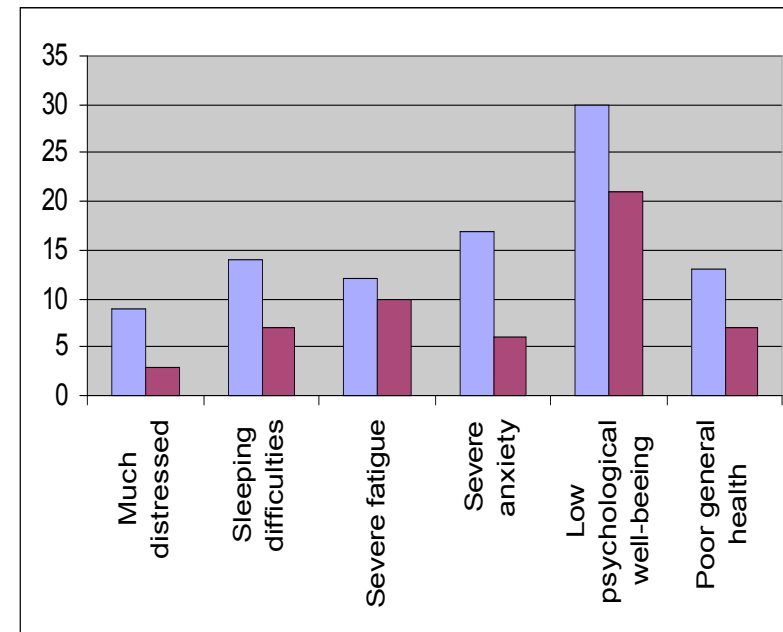
Gamblers at risk have more health problems

Swedish National Public Health Survey 2006 (N=5995 resp. rate 60,1 %)

Men



Women



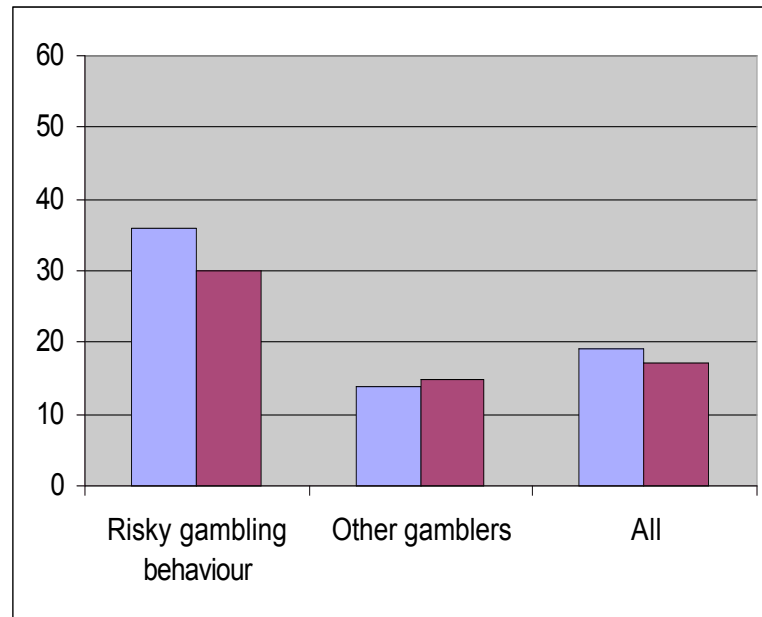
■ Risky gambling behaviour ■ Other gamblers



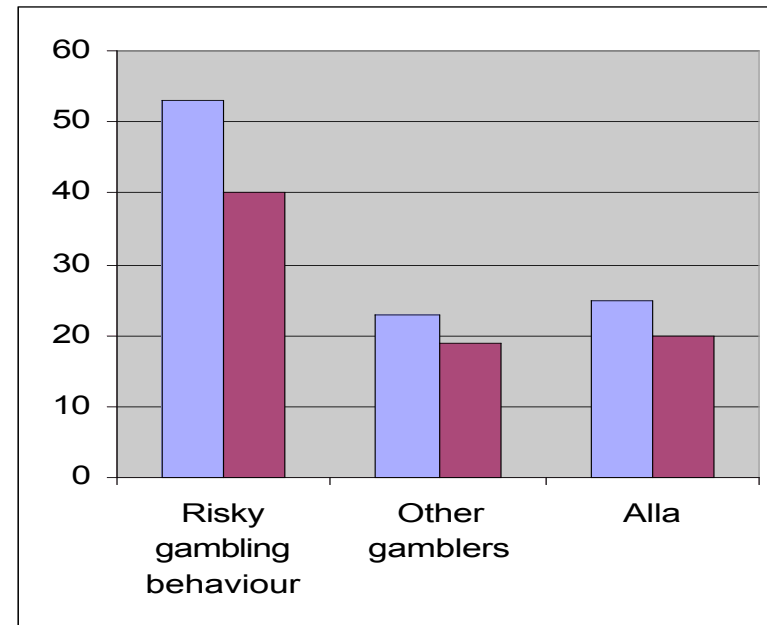
Gamblers at risk have more economic difficulties

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Men



Women



■ No Cash margins
■ E conomical crisis



Why look at Gambling and Problem Gambling from a Public Health Perspective?

- Gambling may create social and health problems
- People with poor health and social and economic difficulties more often get gambling related problems, are harder hit by them and have less access to support and treatment
- The extent of gambling and gambling problems can be influenced by structural means such as regulations, national, regional and local policies
- A comprehensive Public Health Approach have proved to be an efficient way to deal with wide-spread medical and social problems.
- The European court and the EU demands a more explicit social gambling policy if the member states would like to keep national regulation



Instruments for a Public Health Perspective

- Knowledge
- Law
- Regulations
- Policies (international, national, regional and local)
- Methods
- Public awareness
- Feedback



Knowledge

- Knowledge has to be based on
 - population data
 - gambling behaviour
 - the groups at risk
 - scientific methods
- When a new social or medical problem arises the first actions taken are often directed towards the problem group – the ambulance perspective – “cure them”
- Research starts by studying the problem group
- But no real knowledge can be achieved without having access to population data.



Steps towards a better knowledge

- Prevalence studies (the situation is rather good)
- Longitudinal studies (very few have been done)
- Treatment studies (only few controlled studies but some are on its way)
- Studies on methods and effectiveness of preventive efforts (very few published studies on gambling issues but more on alcohol and drug issues)
- Studies on the effectiveness of responsible gambling measures (still missing)
- Studies on the effects of regulations and laws (a complicated issue)
- Studies on the effects of marketing (very few has been done)



Laws, regulations and policies

Why do we have gambling?

- “People will anyhow gamble, either it is legal or not “
- “It is better to regulate gambling than having it underground and illegal, fuelling organised criminality”
- “With gambling regulated we can direct the surplus to ‘good purposes’ as to the State, to NGOs, to sports, to cultural activities and to charity”
- Former it was fairly manageable for the states to control the gambling and to keep the surplus within the nation
- Only few forms of gambling were available
- Now, the situation has changed radically



The new situation – increased competition

- Traditional games as lotteries, lotto, football pools etc. are decreasing
- The customers are offered faster games with a higher pay-back ratio as VLTs (fruit machines), casino games, net poker and other internet-based games – and they seem to prefer them
- There is also international competition of the money from the gamblers, mainly by the internet
- Gambling is available anywhere – there are very few “gambling-free zones”
- The gambling providers have to offer games with more entertainment values and higher pay-back ratio
- Gambling providers have to be more active to develop new types of games and market them

When it comes to gambling it is a very fine line between giving the customers what they want and exploitation



The social costs compared to the net revenue increase

- Games like traditional lotteries, scratch-cards, lotto, and football pools have many players and often have a pay-back ratio of around 50 %.
- Only a small fraction of those who prefer these types of games are problem gamblers. For these games the social costs in relation to the revenues for the organizer are low.
- Electronic gaming machines as VLTs, casino games and many forms of internet gambling have a pay back ratio around 90 % or more. At least in Sweden there are rather few who ever play these games.
- the proportion of problem gamblers in these games is seven to ten times bigger than among players in general. So, in these cases the social costs for every net dollar to the organizers are high.



What are the options for a national policy?

- Compete with the international gambling companies
This will cause increased gambling, increased problems and less net profit
- Regulate and control internet gambling
This will require far-reaching international agreements

Whatever we do we will have an altered gambling market which cannot be seen only as a means to get easy money to the state, NGOs and charity.

To keep the revenues at the same level from gambling will require increased gambling – and increased problems.

So we have to discuss which benefits we can get from gambling



All types of gambling are not subject to international competition

The states still will have the option to regulate and control some of the most risky forms of gambling

- Casinos
- Slot machines and VLTs
- Bingo Halls

It is also possible to regulate marketing and

to give more power to local communities to have their saying on the location of gambling venues and betting shops.



Our knowledge is needed to form a good national policy

- The gambling industry is powerful and have strong lobbyists
- It is our duty as civil servants, scientists and counsellors to inform both decision makers and the general public of our findings about the risks of gambling



Methods in the pathway to a public health based gambling policy

- Creating gambling free zones
- Effective information to parents and school staff on the risks with underage gambling
- Methods for early intervention
- Support and treatment methods, cost-effective, knowledge based and easy accessible

- Development and evaluation of responsible gambling
We don't yet know if responsible gambling measures can compensate for increased gambling



Public awareness

- To much money and efforts are usually spent on information campaigns on alcohol and drugs – the scientific evidence of the positive effect of information is usually weak
- Information activities on problem gambling to the general public will probably be as ineffective – and can hardly compete with the marketing from the gambling actors
- Education and information should be directed mostly to key groups with the aim of creating an awareness of the risks of gambling and of the methods gambling actors use to increase gambling
- One important goal should be how to support a friend, family member or a work-mate with gambling problems
- Information and education on problem gambling requires that those who feel concerned have somewhere to turn to get support
- *Treatment and support possibilities is therefore essential even for primary preventive actions*



Feedback and evaluation of the instruments

- Knowledge
- Law
- Regulations
- Policies (international, national, regional and local)
- Methods
- Public awareness

The market is constantly changing, the technology gets more and more advanced, and politics change focus from time to time

That are some reasons why we always have to evaluate and assess our measures – taming the gambling industry is a never-ending task



What we have done as far in Sweden

- Development and evaluation of outpatient care in the three biggest cities in Sweden
- Development of an internet-based self-help programme
- A program to develop and evaluate treatment for young people
- A national helpline
- Support to self-help groups and NGOs
- Education of key personnel in various social service sectors
- Information to the Social Welfare Sector and the Health service
- Planning of a new prevalence study and methods to monitor gambling problems in the population and among young people
- Support to research, among others, on marketing, on the effects of the casino introduction on young people and gambling, on internet gaming, on biological background to gambling addiction
- A cooperative body – the OSS-group for discussions with the major gambling providers and other significant actors



What is still to be done

Even if great progress has been made, there is still much to do, among other things:

- The government's gambling policy is not yet governed by a public health perspective
- Gambling issues and preventive efforts are not yet integrated parts in social welfare and health work
- The effectiveness of responsible gambling measures is not evaluated
- Methods and programmes for early intervention have yet to be developed

Read more about our efforts at www.fhi.se/spelberoende