



## Family violence and problem gambling

February 2008

### Family violence comes in many forms

- **Physical Abuse:** includes hitting, biting, throwing things, punching walls, using weapons.
- **Sexual Abuse:** includes any sexual act to which the other person does not freely give consent.
- **Psychological and Emotional Abuse:** includes constant fear of physical violence, degrading comments, threats, put downs, verbal abuse.
- **Social Abuse:** includes limited contact with family and friends, monitoring phone calls and mail, deliberate geographical isolation. Having to constantly account for the other's whereabouts.
- **Financial Abuse:** includes control over finances, forbidding a woman to work, unreasonable budgeting expectations.
- **Harassment and Stalking:** includes constant telephone calls, threatening letters, following or photographing.

### Family violence and the link to problem gambling

Research on the link between domestic violence or Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) and problem gambling to date has been limited. But there is evidence that IPV may be more prevalent amongst problem gamblers than in the general population. IPV increased with the development of problem gambling.<sup>1</sup>

A recent Canadian study examined the prevalence and severity of IPV among a group of problem gamblers and found that 62.9% reported perpetrating or being a victim of IPV within the last 12 months. 55.6% reported perpetrating physical assault, injury and/or sexual coercion, and 25.4% reported severe IPV. 64.5% had significant anger problems.<sup>2</sup>

A 2007 New Zealand study on family violence in Asian communities found that IPV was often due to life style changes caused by immigration, such as finding employment and having problems with finances. Tse reported that IPV was considered a private matter and that shame was often a barrier for seeking help, as well as the desire to keep the marriage intact.<sup>3</sup>

A survey of 144 spouses of compulsive gamblers indicated that 50% were physically and verbally abused by their spouses and 12% had attempted suicide.<sup>4</sup> Brand et al (1993) found that 23% of

pathologic gamblers admitted to "hitting or throwing things more than once at their spouse or partner."<sup>5</sup> One in ten gamblers in counselling reported domestic or other violent incidents related to their gambling.<sup>6</sup>

A 1999 survey of 215 spouses of pathological gamblers indicated that they often suffer from headaches, stomach problems, dizziness, and breathing difficulties, in addition to emotional problems of anger, depression, and isolation.<sup>7</sup> These were usually due to psychological abuse.

Children of problem gamblers were reported to be two to three times more likely to be abused by both the gambler and his or her spouse than their peers.<sup>8</sup>

In a 2005 study on assault the most frequently cited reason for assault on women, with the exception of not known which was 41.5%, was alcohol and gambling for 37% of interviewees.<sup>9</sup>

In Taiwan a study found that under a traditional Chinese family structure men had the final authority and women were beaten if they did not give their private money to their husband for his gambling needs.<sup>10</sup>

#### For support, assistance and more information:

Seek out a family/couples counselling service in your area or contact  
National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges <http://www.womensrefuge.org.nz/>

#### For more family violence information:

NZ Family Violence Clearinghouse (3) 364 2296 <http://www.nzfvc.org.nz/>  
Family and Community Services <http://www.familyservices.govt.nz/our-work/preventing-violence/>



**A woman whose partner was a problem gambler is 10.5 times more likely to be a victim of violence from her partner than partners of a non-problem gambler.<sup>11</sup>**

### **Alcohol**

Problem drinking by a problem gambler increases the risk of family violence. In a 2002 study 64% of the women interviewed had partners with problem gambling and 60% who had partners with both problem gambling and problem drinking thought there was a relationship between gambling and IPV.<sup>11</sup>

### **Co-existence**

It was suggested that family violence and addiction disorders do not merely co-exist — they actually share many features. These shared features include loss of control, anger, continuation despite adverse consequences, preoccupation or obsession, tolerance and withdrawal, involvement of the entire family, and the use of the defenses of denial, minimization, and rationalization.<sup>2, 11</sup>

### **Control**

The issue of having control in life and relationships connects IPV and gambling issues. As well as having, asserting, maintaining and/or reclaiming control there are issues of problem gambling as a response to being controlled.

### **Unemployment**

The risk of family violence increased if the gambler was not fully employed. Possibly the financial stress increases the risk that a man will physically abuse his partner. The additional financial stress brought on by problem gambling could well add to that risk.<sup>3, 11</sup>

### **Immigration**

Triggers for IPV included difficulties in adjusting to living in a new country. The loss of cultural and traditional dominance by some men, and racism and discrimination some women experienced when trying to find work or resolve financial dependency issues was found to put women at extreme risk of abuse and violence.<sup>3</sup>

**Women who experience abuse may gamble as a response to being controlled as it gives them a chance to get away, to feel numb and not think about their abusive relationships.<sup>1</sup>**

1. Community West. 2007. *Exploring the links between family violence & problem gambling*. Melbourne, State Government of Victoria.
2. Koma LM et al. 2008. Problem gambling and intimate partner violence. *Journal of Gambling Studies* 24: 13-23.
3. Tse S. 2007. Family violence in Asian communities, combining research and community development. *Social Policy Journal of New Zealand* 31: 170-194.
4. Lorenz VC and Yaffee RA. 1988. Pathological gambling & psychosomatic, emotional and mental difficulties as reported by the spouse. *Journal of Gambling Behavior* 4 :13-26.
5. Bland RC, Newman SC, Orn H, Stebelski G. 1993. Epidemiology of pathologic gambling in Edmonton. *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry* 38:108-12.
6. Australian Productivity Commission. 1999. *Australia's gambling industries. Report no.10*. Canberra: AusInfo.
7. National Opinion Research Center . 1999. *Gambling impact and behavior study: report to the national gambling impact study commission* . Chicago: University of Chicago, p.9.
8. Darbyshire P, Oster C, Carrig H. 2001. Children of parents who have a gambling problem: a review of the literature and commentary of research approaches. *Health & Social Care in the Community* 9 (4): 185-193.
9. Balci YG, Ayranci U. 2005. Physical violence against women: Evaluation of women assaulted by spouses. *Journal of Clinical Forensic Medicine* 12 (5): 258-263.
10. Xu X et al. 2005. Prevalence of and Risk Factors for Intimate Partner Violence in China. *American Journal of Public Health* 95: 78-85.
11. Muellemann RL et al. 2002. Problem Gambling in the Partner of the Emergency Department Patient as a Risk Factor for Intimate Partner Violence. *Journal of Emergency Medicine* 23 :307-312.

**Problem Gambling Foundation Hotline  
0800 664 262**