

POKER: Problem Gambling's New Frontier?

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An Australian wins \$10 million playing a card game in Las Vegas and becomes an overnight celebrity. This is the moment when it all begins. No we're not talking about Melbourne man Joe Hachem's success at this year's World Series of Poker, we're talking about the stimulus for another source of significant gambling problems in the community.

Poker, is taking the world, and in recent times, Australia by storm. Poker nights were not a common feature of Australian culture as they have been in the US, however since "Aussie Joe's" win in Vegas the game has caught on in Australia. Poker kits complete with cards, chips and tables are now available from department stores in all price ranges, through toy and game shops and even \$2-type shops.

Of course Australia's poker capital is Melbourne's Crown Casino, home of the Australian Poker Championships. Crown has its own Poker Room in which it runs regular tournaments, as well as operating a 'private poker salon' targeting high stakes gamblers.

Local poker is even joining the ranks of reality television with this month's filming of Foxtel's Australian Celebrity Poker Challenge.

It may seem like harmless fun, but poker has a dark side. The number of problem gamblers seeking help due to poker and other casino games is increasing. Here are some facts:



However even these figures are just the tip of the iceberg. Research from around the world details worrying increases in the numbers of people developing problems due to poker. US media reports suggest that 4-5% of adult players will develop a serious gambling problem, but even more alarming is the fact that young people have three times more risk than adults of developing a problem.

America is already facing a situation where the popularity of poker amongst young people following coverage on television is translating into significant issues for many, some of whom are now attending programs and counselling for their gambling.

There is also a suggestion that gambling by young people may be a gateway to even 'riskier' behaviours. According to the US National Council on Problem Gambling, research has shown that young people who gamble are more likely to binge drink, smoke marijuana, skip school and have unsafe sex.

Another concern, apart from the increase in regulated and unregulated poker games, has been the attraction of many to the wide range of internet poker sites which offer 24 hour play and the potential for large winnings. This could become the hook for many Australians to take up internet gambling, as the interest in this form of gambling in Australia has been small apart from sportsbetting.

In this issue we will look at "The What and Why of Poker" and what the research shows about this growing issue.

Reference: Youth Gamblers on the Rise, Christian Science Monitor, March 25 2005.
<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2005/03/25/national/main683088.shtml>
Client Statistics for Gambler's Help Southern



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VCGR UPDATE

The Victorian Commission for Gambling Regulation (VCGR) regulates all forms of gambling in Victoria and poker is no exception. Here is the VCGR's advice on the legality of unlicensed poker in Victoria.

Can poker be played at home for money?

It is lawful to play poker for money at a private house or residence, for entertainment purposes only, provided that:-

- the function is not for the promotion of a trade or business,
- there is no charge for participation; and
- no person derives a percentage or share of the amount or amounts wagered.

Can poker be played in a licensed premises or other public place?

There are no restrictions, under the gaming legislation, which would prohibit poker or any other card game being played in a bar or other public place providing that no money is involved.

Is it possible to conduct a poker tournament or poker competition for money?

It is not possible for anyone, other than the licensed casino operator, to conduct a commercial poker game, for money, in Victoria.

Gaming Venue Applications November 2005

Beretta's Langwarrin Hotel, Langwarrin

To allow increase in number of machines from 34 to 44

**Hearing Adjourned
Resumes 8th November**



**POKER SURVEY:
Help us find out
if Australia is full
of poker players**

Fill out our short, two minute online survey on poker at www.ghsouthern.org.au/pokersurvey

The What and Why of Poker

Poker has been a popular game around the world for decades. This is probably because little equipment is required to play and the rules of the basic game are easy to learn. However it is an extremely difficult game to master due to the variations of the game, the skill level and decision making of opposing players and the random fall of the cards.

The aim of poker is to win the pot, which is the sum of all the players' wagers during a round. A player hopes that he has the best hand (five cards), or gives the impression that he holds a strong hand thus convincing his opponents to fold (abandon) their hands.

You win a hand by revealing your hand to be the best, or by all other players folding their hands.

Texas Hold 'Em Poker

Texas Hold 'Em Poker is the most popular form of poker played today.

This is mainly because it is quite simple to play and much of the action is visible to all players. (Only two cards are hidden.)

Because the game is played with a single deck of cards, and each player has two cards, it is also quite easy to work out the odds of getting the card that you need for your hand, allowing you to bet accordingly. This enables players to use skill rather than depend on luck like other games.

Poker is very attractive for players as while it has a component of luck, skill plays a significant role. Skills involved don't only cover playing strategies, they also include the ability to bluff opponents or intimidate them into making bad decisions or folding their hand.

Casinos like offering poker as they are guaranteed a profit regardless of which player wins. They take a 'rake' which is a percentage of the pot.

It is possible for some players to win significant amounts simply by playing against less skilled players. However ultimately, like all gambling, returns are not guaranteed and the risks of losing are high.

TEXAS HOLD 'EM POKER RULES OF PLAY



The aim of Texas Hold 'Em is to build the best five-card poker hand from the two in your hand (the hole cards) and the five dealt on the table. Betting proceeds through each round - first the deal, then the flop, followed by the turn and river cards.

Could it be about time?

Gambler's Help Southern Counsellor Nial Wotherspoon asks if time management is the cause of many gamblers' problems and what can be done about it.

If you think carefully about gambling, it's an activity that can only be done if you have two things, money to gamble with and the time to gamble. There is usually an emphasis on money, your money, how much of it you gamble, how quickly, whether you get any back and how you're feeling as a result.

Although gambling requires some concentration with practice it can be done almost automatically. You can be in a daze, mesmerized, hung-over, planning other things, worrying about problems though still able to gamble. Especially on poker machines. Just feed them and push the buttons, they'll do the rest. In fact some people resort to using things like drink coasters to jam buttons down to save them pushing the buttons (while doing something else, usually watching the spinning reels and worrying). It's probably the only activity you can do half wrong and still get it right. All this requires you to get experience and practice, and importantly, use time, THAT IS your time. Your time however is all you really have.

Gambling can therefore provide an outlet for many people in terms of their time management, especially if you are a person who likes to keep busy, occupied, on the go and even unavailable. In fact it may be your only respite from the hurly burly life of work, family and the constancy of

problems that keep presenting. It could provide a social outlet, getting you out of the house, a break at the office or it could enable you to 'disappear' for a while, taking time out.

If gambling assists you with your time management, allowing some time 'just for you' then this may also be an opportunity to 'tweak' some personal time to allow something more productive to happen. Maybe your gambling has something to do with your time management and the need 'to be doing something all the time.' If this is the case then it may be time to revisit your goals, what you want and how you go about achieving these. Perhaps this could even be a time for developing new skills, an opportunity for living with less stress by having more productive non-gambling time. What you do with your time simply can become entrenched, reinforcing the ways you use it, narrowing your focus and your options. Having fewer options with the use of your time makes the task of reducing or stopping gambling much more difficult.

The staff at Gamblers Help Southern are trained to assist you in this regard, helping you explore some possibilities, overcome obstacles and move forward. Contacting them may be another opportunity.

Poker: a young persons game?

According to research carried out on US teenagers by Canada's McGill University, poker is the most popular form of gambling amongst high school students.

A 2004 survey found that 66% of teens gambled on poker during a 12 month period, a figure that is expected to be higher now given the growth in popularity of poker in the last year.

The poker craze seems to be spreading due to the mainstream acceptance of gambling compared with previous generations, where gambling was not encouraged.

Researchers following the poker trend, say that as well as the number of young players increasing, teens are starting to play at a younger age and may be more prone to developing gambling problems.

There is also evidence of young gamblers graduating to high stakes gambling when they reach legal age. This can lead to problems as adults where gambling affects work or study, relationship and finances.

Problem gambling among young gamblers is very high considering that they can't participate in regulated forms of gambling. A study by the US National Centre for Responsible Gambling found that up to 15% of people under 18 can be classified as having gambling problems.

It is yet to be seen whether these figures are replicated in Australia, however with the growing interest in poker we can expect to follow this trend.

Reference: Espinoza, M. (2004) Teens: The New Face of Poker, The Press Democrat, Sunday October 17 2004.

What's New on www.ghsouthern.org.au

Starting to Put Your Gambling First - New State Government Campaign

Starting to Put Your Gambling First is the latest instalment in the Victorian Government's communications campaign to address problem gambling. Supporting materials are available online.

Register now to access a wide range of published research and other resources. It's free!

Problem Gambling Resources Links

In the weblinks section of the Gambler's Help Southern Website is a new category titled Problem Gambling Resources. Here you will find links to items which can be used by professionals and students to understand more about problem gambling.

POKER: A Wide Range of Research

Poker has been the focus of a wide range of research for many years. Subjects looked at by researchers go beyond the usual topics of problem gambling, player behaviour and consumption to fields such as artificial intelligence, mathematics and even whether playing poker gives you skills that can be used in other areas of life.

Almost a demonstration of how topical poker is, just last month the Opinion section of the Journal of Gambling Issues (JGI)* featured the article "Can playing poker be

good for you? Poker as a transferable skill" ^ . The piece resulted from an approach to the authors from Nottingham Trent University in the UK by an on-line gaming company, asking them to "examine the skills involved in playing poker and to assess to what extent the skills involved had any transferability to real-life situations."

*JGI is produced by Canada's Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH)

^ http://www.camh.net/egambling/issue14/jgi_14_parke.html

Crown Staff hit the Jackpot with a visit from a financial counsellor

Wednesday 19th October 2005 – Anna Selkridge-Jones, a Financial Counsellor with Gambler's Help Southern was invited to talk to the Crown Casino Responsible Gaming Liaison Officers at their monthly staff meeting.

They were interested to hear about what Financial Counsellors do and the types of scenarios that clients present with at our service.

A robust discussion followed about credit cards and the refinancing of debts through financial institutions. Feedback from the staff was one of amazement at the important role that Financial Counsellors play in our community.

SELF HELP PILOT PROJECT More Organisations Needed

In the July 2005 issue of Gambling Matters we described the first phase of the Gambler's Help Southern Self Help Pilot Project which attempts to reach people who are experiencing gambling related problems but don't want counselling.

We are currently seeking organisations to be involved in the second phase of the project which is the distribution of Action Packs at various community locations.

For more information or to become involved please contact Tracey Collins on 9575 5311 or at t.collins@ghsouthern.org.au

Gambler's Help Southern provides free, confidential, professional support for gamblers, their families and others affected by gambling.

Services available include:

- Counselling for gambling related issues
- Financial Counselling
- Multicultural Services
- Community Education
- Professional Development

We can also provide a wide range of resources and information such as:

- Self-help guides
- Information Sessions
- Training Sessions
- Brochures and Cards
- Posters
- Advice on gambling and gaming issues

All staff are qualified professionals in their area of expertise and have experience dealing with gambling issues.

If you have concerns about your gambling, or the gambling of a family member or friend, call Gambler's Help Southern Intake between 9.30 and 4.30 on 9575 5353 or the Gambler's Help Telephone Counselling Service which is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week on 1800 156 789.

GAMBLER'S HELP™ 1800 156 789

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