

# “Gambling with Our (Kids’) Futures” Revisited

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In 2006, the Vanier Institute published an article by Arlene Moscovitch on the impact that gambling has on children and families.<sup>1</sup> Since then, Canadian gambling revenues have remained steady, at approximately \$13.75 billion annually.<sup>2</sup> However, as governments continue to explore opportunities for additional sources of revenue, gambling expansion is being considered across Canada, including the opening of new casinos, legalization of Internet gambling and further expansion of electronic gambling machines into non-casino venues.

In addition, gambling businesses have sought to expand their customer base by embracing new technologies and targeting new demographics. We can now gamble alone at electronic slot machines in casinos furnished with ATMs but without clocks or windows, or at home at any time via the Internet and now even on our cellphones.<sup>3</sup>

Around 6 in 10 Canadians living alone reported spending money on at least one gambling activity in 2011.<sup>4</sup> Now that technology has made it possible to gamble alone anytime and anywhere, people with gambling problems are surrounded by gambling opportunities like never before. Research suggests that approximately 35%–40% of gambling revenues come from the estimated 4.7% of people who struggle with problem and pathological gambling.<sup>5</sup> These “best customers” tend to be drawn from vulnerable groups within our society: youth, seniors, people living with low incomes, newcomers and people suffering from social isolation.<sup>6</sup>

## Risks, costs and consequences

The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) and Toronto Public Health have identified a range of consequences for people’s health and well-

being that result from “problem gambling,” including financial difficulties, alcohol- or fatigue-related traffic fatalities, family breakdown and divorce, family/intimate partner violence, impaired child development, neglect and poverty.<sup>7</sup> In addition, the strong feelings gambling problems can invoke among family members can make it even harder to manage the problem.

In Australia, researchers interviewed fifteen 7- to 18-year-olds living in households with a “problem gambler” who described the experience as one of “pervasive loss.” Those losses included time spent

### WHAT IS “PROBLEM GAMBLING”?\*

Unlike casual gambling, the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) identifies a person’s gambling behaviour as problematic when it interferes with their work, school, health, financial well-being or interpersonal relationships. The most detrimental forms of gambling include:

#### Harmful gambling

People who are harmful gamblers experience some of the complications and difficulties described above as a result of their behaviour.

#### Pathological gambling

Pathological gamblers experience the same issues as harmful gamblers, but to a much greater degree. All aspects of their lives are affected, as they feel unable to control the urge to gamble despite knowledge of its harmful effects.



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with parents, a lost sense of safety, a loss of relationships with extended families and a loss of material security. The losses were so profound that researchers concluded that “parental problem gambling must now be considered a significant child health as well as social problem.”<sup>8</sup>

## Prevention and harm reduction

Treatment for gambling problems emphasizes prevention and harm reduction by restricting gambling access, including restricting the general *availability* of gambling, restricting the more harmful types of gambling and restricting the *number* and *location* of gambling venues.<sup>9</sup> If government dependency on gambling revenues continues or increases, this could fuel the expansion of gambling options and the growth of the gambling industry. The resulting increase in opportunities for gambling could result in financial, health and social consequences for people with gambling problems. In order to mitigate the negative impacts gambling can have on individuals, families and communities, a combination of conversation, research, education and regulation is required.

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*With additional research provided by Arlene Moscovitch.*

<sup>1</sup> Arlene Moscovitch (2006). “Gambling with Our (Kids’) Futures: Gambling As a Family Policy Issue,” from *Contemporary Family Trends*. Vanier Institute of the Family. Accessed June 12, 2013. <http://bit.ly/14wgh5x>

<sup>2</sup> Katherine Marshall (2011). “Gambling 2011,” in *Perspectives on Labour and Income* (September 23, 2011). Statistics Canada Catalogue No. 75-001-X. Accessed February 28, 2013. <http://bit.ly/qkJIWW>

<sup>3</sup> P.J. Adams, J. Raeburn and K. de Silva (2009). “A Question of Balance: Prioritizing Public Health Responses to Harm from Gambling,” in *Addiction* 104(5), 688-691. Accessed February 28, 2013. <http://1.usa.gov/14gDVQC>

<sup>4</sup> Marshall (2011).

<sup>5</sup> Jason J. Azmier (2005). *Gambling in Canada 2005: Statistics and Context*. Canada West Foundation (June 2005). Accessed February 28, 2013. <http://bit.ly/12XK9Xe>

<sup>6</sup> Toronto Public Health and CAMH (2012). *The Health Impacts of Gambling Expansion in Toronto, Technical Report 9* (November 2012). Accessed February 28, 2013. <http://bit.ly/QZqGQ1>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> P. Darbyshire, C. Oster and H. Carrig (2001). “The Experience of Pervasive Loss: Children and Young People Living in a Family Where Parental Gambling Is a Problem,” in *Journal of Gambling Studies* (Spring 2001); 17(1):23-45. Accessed March 1, 2013. <http://1.usa.gov/1b9jiYu>

<sup>9</sup> R.J. Williams, B.L. West and R.I. Simpson (2008). *Prevention of Problem Gambling: A Comprehensive Review of the Evidence*. Report prepared for the Ontario Problem Gambling Research Centre (December 1, 2007). Accessed February 28, 2013. <http://bit.ly/13DmCJL>

\* Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (2008). *Problem Gambling: The Issues, the Options*. Accessed July 12, 2013. <http://bit.ly/1ctpFZY>

\*\* Ibid.



## IMPACT ON FAMILIES\*\*

The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) identifies several ways in which gambling problems can affect families:

### Financial stress

Problem gambling can result in a loss of savings, property or belongings, affecting the well-being of family members.

### Emotional strain

The strong feelings gambling problems evoke among family members can make it hard to fulfill family responsibilities, obligations and commitments.

### Social withdrawal

People with gambling problems may have a harder time establishing and maintaining relationships with family members and friends.

### Physical/mental health risks

People with gambling problems may experience anxiety, depression and physical ailments, such as ulcers, headaches and poor sleep.

### Family burnout

Family members coping with a person’s gambling problem may burn out after trying to keep control and forgetting to care for themselves.

### Children’s isolation

Children in a family with a parent who has a gambling problem may feel neglected, blame themselves, have difficulty trusting others or misbehave.

### Physical/emotional abuse

Gambling problems may lead to physical or emotional abuse of a family member.