

Characteristics of Problem Gamblers in Treatment in the Czech Republic: a Cross-sectional Questionnaire Survey



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BACKGROUND: Some individuals' gambling develops into problem gambling, including serious health, social, and economic impacts. **AIMS:** To describe the characteristics of problem gamblers, their gambling careers, and the social, economic, and health correlations and consequences of pathological gambling in the Czech Republic. **METHOD:** A cross-sectional questionnaire survey on a sample of diagnosed pathological gamblers (F63.0 in ICD-10). **SAMPLE:** 229 respondents were interviewed in 27 treatment facilities. They were mostly men (93.4%) and aged 34 on average. **RESULTS:** The majority of the respondents in the sample reported playing electronic gaming machines (EGMs) as their primary problem gambling activity. On average, their total debt was CZK 894 thousand (€ 33 thousand). About 7.6% of the money for gambling came from illegal activities. 53.6% of the respondents found that their financial problems caused them the greatest difficulty. Relationship and mental health problems were identi-

fied as major difficulties by 22.4% and 18.2% of the respondents respectively. Nervousness and irritability (67.7%), anxiety and insomnia (both 59.8%), suicidal thoughts (41.0%), and cardiovascular problems (28.4%) were reported as the most common health problems. The majority of the respondents (83.8%) had perceived gambling as a problem during their gambling careers. About 80% had tried to stop. Help was sought three or more years after the problems had occurred. **CONCLUSIONS:** Pathological gambling is a chronic relapsing condition accompanied by frequent health and social functioning disorders. Financial problems and the disruption of relationships are perceived as the most serious consequences which lead to seeking help. While in 2013 the majority of the problems were caused by EGMs, an increase in problem gambling associated with online gambling is expected in the future. Early diagnosis and intervention is key to preventing problem gambling and reducing the harm it entails.

KEY WORDS: PROBLEM GAMBLING – DISORDERED GAMBLING – COMORBIDITY – SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES

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