Reflections on Problem Gambling and Poverty/Homelessness

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MAP Centre for Urban Health Solutions is a world-leading research centre dedicated to creating a healthier future for all. Through big-picture research and street-level solutions, MAP scientists tackle complex urban health issues — many at the intersection of health and inequality. Internationally recognized for groundbreaking science and innovation, MAP has changed the way the world understands the health consequences of social inequality in cities. Together with its community and policy partners, MAP is charting the way to the world’s healthiest cities: places where people, communities, and the political, economic, social, environmental, and health infrastructures come together so that everyone can thrive.

MAP Centre for Urban Health Solutions is part of the Li Ka Shing Knowledge Institute of St. Michael’s Hospital and is fully affiliated with the University of Toronto. St. Michael’s is a site of Unity Health Toronto, which also includes Providence Healthcare and St. Joseph’s Health Centre.
Objectives

1. Understand the connection between problem gambling and poverty/homelessness.
2. Understand of the complex nature of the relationship between problem gambling, health, and poverty/homelessness.
3. Have a set of strategies for engaging problem gambling challenges among patients/clients experiencing poverty/homelessness.
What kind of work do you do?

Let us know in the chat!
THE NORMALIZATION OF GAMBLING
Connection between Problem Gambling and Poverty/Homelessness

› Prevalence of PG = 15% to 58% in economically deprived individuals (data collected from shelter and related service agencies)

› Prevalence of gambling problems among those experiencing poverty higher than in the general population

› Bankruptcy and financial debt is high

› Stigma is highly apparent and negatively affects help-seeking and compounded by shame of homelessness and poverty

› The majority of those who gamble excessively report gambling problems preceding homelessness (82.4%)
Men experiencing poverty and homelessness are nine times more likely to experience problem gambling than the general population.\textsuperscript{5}

“You don’t realize it’s hurting you until you get to the point where you lose everything. You have nothing to live for anymore. It gets to the point where I’m in and out of shelters, in and out of shelters, in and out of shelters.”
A Conversation with Jason
Case Study: Female, Aged 44

A 44 year old female patient comes to see you. She says that she is depressed and lonely because she recently lost her husband. She also tells you that she can’t make ends meet and is finding it difficult to pay her rent at the end of the month. She has recently started going to casinos so she has some social contact.
If you saw a patient presenting with these characteristics, how could you help?
Consequences of Problem Gambling and Homelessness

- Serious financial harm and debt
- Emotional distress
- Relationship disruptions
- Reduced productivity at work/job loss
- Physical and mental health problems
- Homelessness
### Pathways to Problem Gambling & Homelessness: Social Determinants of Health

- Poverty
- Disability
- Education
- Culture/racial identity
- Mental illness
- Childhood trauma (abuse/neglect)
- Substance use disorders
- Lack of social support
- Sex/gender
- Neighborhood conditions
- Community connectivity

*“My health is deteriorating… I may have to go on insulin. The only thing gambling is going to do is make me sicker….it’s like a drug.”*
Problem Gambling is Correlated with Complex Health and Social Issues

- Housing Instability
- Criminal Justice Involvement
- Physical Health Problems
- Substance Use
- Mental Health Problems
- Loss of Access to Children
- Bereavement
- Failure of Social Assistance
- Trauma
- Job and Financial Insecurity
- Trauma
- Bereavement
- Failure of Social Assistance
- Trauma
- Job and Financial Insecurity
“I think financial hardship because when I was laid off I was on Employment Insurance which was fine but then, when I went to ODSP, all of a sudden it was almost like half of what I used to get from Employment Insurance. So, I think just kind of turning off the faucet so to speak financially the avenues you can take to change your life, you’re either going to get...you have to meet somebody who has...who’s wealthy, the place and time that they can put you up, or you’re just going to live day to day, just exist. You don’t live, you just exist.”
“Almost all of my clients who I’ve personally worked with have more than one issue. I mean, not only are they all in poverty and they all have gambling issues, but some of them have mental health issues, some of them have family conflict, a lot of them are unemployed or have a disability of some kind so to just treat the gambling would be to not treat the whole person.”
Complex Challenges Demand Complex Solutions

› Need for integrative screening and treatment in various healthcare settings

› Primary care clinicians should implement practice of screening and treating problem gambling

› Improved awareness of problem gambling in settings working with mental health issues

› Effective treatment that addresses the unique complications of multiple diagnoses

› Example: Good Shepherd Ministry Gambling Addiction Program
Good Shepherd Ministry Gambling Addiction Program

› Targets people who have a gambling problem and who access shelters and other social services in Toronto

› Two full-time Gambling Addiction Case Workers provide problem gambling recovery supports and services to individual clients
  – Counseling, skills training, goal setting, and crisis intervention

› Facilitate two recovery groups
  – Cognitive Behavioral Therapy-based group
  – Life-Skills group

› Integration of gambling into a multi-service delivery model
Strategies for Discussing Problem Gambling with Patients Experiencing Homelessness

How do you start a conversation about gambling with your clients?
Strategies for Discussing Problem Gambling with Patients Experiencing Homelessness

› Make it routine to talk about gambling.
› Be alert to the signs of problem gambling.
› Make information on problem gambling available.
› Integrate a problem gambling screener into practice.
› Provide accurate information about how gambling works.
› Help clients identify the consequences of their gambling.
› Support clients in their attempts to cut down or quit gambling.
› Describe problem gambling counselling and Gamblers Anonymous if someone is interested in getting support.
Problem Gambling: A Guide For Helping People Experiencing Poverty

With the Problem Gambling Institute of Ontario at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health and Good Shepherd Ministries, the research team co-developed a manual to guide social and health service providers working with people who have low incomes, housing concerns and concerns with gambling.

Link
Landscape of Services for Problem Gambling

- Few services in North America
- Long waitlists
- Services neglect harms associated with comorbidities
- Rarely integrated into other case management services
- Requires housing and financial supports
- Multiple competing needs: poverty, isolation, disability, chronic illness

Illustration: Joe Fleming
Self-Help and Self-Management

› Barriers to treatment
  – Geographical distance
  – Long waitlists
  – Treatment costs
  – Individual barriers $\rightarrow$ denial or fear of stigmatization
  – Service hours

› Technological solutions to support self-management of problem gambling
  – Spring! App
Steps Forward

Problem Gambling

- Awareness of link between PG and homelessness
- Communications training in services for vulnerable populations
- Integrated services for complex social and health concerns
- Awareness of services and supports
- Technological solutions for self-management of PG
Any questions?

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Citations


