Women and problem gambling

For many women, gambling begins as an enjoyable, recreational activity. Women are typically introduced to gambling through a family member, and view it as an opportunity for fun and socializing—which it can be.



Unfortunately, this recreational pursuit can develop into a severe problem for some, and may lead to relationship, family, financial and career difficulties.

The number of reported female gamblers is on the rise. In a recent study by the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission, women made up 53 per cent of the gambling population, compared to the one-third reported 20 years ago. Generally, women gamble as a means to escape from emotional problems—abuse, addiction, trauma, sexual abuse, loneliness, a controlling spouse or financial problems.

Tips and tools you can use

If you are concerned that you or a woman close to you may be a problem gambler, understand that initial self-denial is common. Many women are closet gamblers and don't talk openly about their winnings, making gambling patterns more difficult to detect. Additionally, family members may often help women cover up their problems.

Profile of a female gambler

Here are some traits and warning signs to look out for, to help you recognize a woman gambler. Consider if she:

- Gambles for emotional escape from problems
- Has often experienced some form of trauma
- Suffers from chronic loneliness, which may be related to spousal absence
- Usually gambles alone
- Tends to play games of luck rather than skill
- Rarely brags of wins
- Began gambling as an adult
- Often becomes depressed

Contributing factors

There may also be external factors contributing to a woman’s gambling problem, which may fuel the issue as a means to escape negative situations in her life, such as:

- Desire for social interaction
- Money issues
- Emotional instability
- Alcohol or drug dependence
- Accessibility of gambling
- A craving for excitement
- Living alone or having trouble at home

Preferred forms of gambling

As mentioned, women tend to prefer gambling games of luck, rather than skill. Here are some notable favourites:

- Instant/scratch tickets
- Lotteries
- Slot machines
- Bingo
- Pull-tabs

Workplace warning signs

If you suspect that one of your female co-workers has a gambling problem, here are some traits and workplace incidents to look out for. Take note if your co-worker:

- Frequently leaves work early or arrives late
- Disappears from work without explanation—often after lunch
- Utilizes excessive sick time
- Is decreasing her productivity
- Is not well groomed
- Receives calls from bill collectors
- Appears tired and depressed
- Withdraws from colleagues
- Becomes untrustworthy with money
- Gambles until her last dollar is spent
- Gambles to solve financial difficulties
- Borrows money to gamble or to pay gambling debts
- Is currently dealing with trouble at home

Though gambling may be a fun recreational and social activity, when coupled with other negative factors, gambling can quickly become a problem for many women. Fortunately though, help is becoming increasingly available in this regard.