

# Problem gambling in Russia

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# HISTORY

- Playing cards became available in Russia in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Almost immediately, the Tsar's government made it illegal. In 1649, a part of Legislation banning playing cards was listed under the title of Robbery and Stealing. Card players were supposed to be whipped and their fingers and hands could be cut off. In those cruel times, Russia was not alone in such harsh policy against gamblers.
- However, later, in 18<sup>th</sup> century, during the era of Peter the Great, the first Russian emperor, the punishment for card playing was replaced with the monetary fines.

# HISTORY

- In 1761, the empress Ekaterina II (known as Catherine the Great) had made a distinction between legitimate (games of commerce) and non-legitimate (games of chance) gambling. It was allowed to play games where the victory depends not only on the “fortune”, but also upon the skills of the players, such as bridge. It was acceptable to play in the rich noble estates and it was prohibited to make huge bets. In the Royal Palace, card games took place almost daily. It was forbidden to play roulette, shtoss, spot (pip) – the analogue of Black Jack – as well as lottery, and betting on horse races. Gamblers were to pay a special tax to support the Fund for orphanages.

# HISTORY

- In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, gambling had become an epidemic phenomenon in Russia. All kinds of games had spread out and were common among many categories of citizens. However, higher and lower social classes played in different places and rarely mixed in new establishments, casinos or clubs. A pattern to play games and to consume large amounts of alcoholic beverages came into place.
- Particularly, gambling was popular among the military officers, including the high ranking ones. Based on historic data, most likely all we know today about social and clinical aspects of gambling was fully present in the Russian society of 19<sup>th</sup> to the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- The consequences of gambling varied from losing the family estates to embezzlement of the governmental money (or regimental funds in the military) to suicide. A lot of noble families suffered from the gambling addiction.

# HISTORY

- Craving for playing roulette and cards was extremely well described in the Russian classical literature by the most famous authors such as Alexander Pushkin (*The Queen of Spades*), and Feodor Dostoyevsky (*The Gambler*). *The Gambler* provides probably the best psychological description of pathological gambling in the world literature.

# HISTORY (Fyodor Dostoyevsky)

- Dostoyevsky was a pathological gambler himself. He made several trips to Western Europe to play and he inevitably lost a lot of his inheritance as well as the money of his wife's family. To understand the sufferings of his and his family, let us quote a few letters written by Feodor Dostoyevsky to his wife – Anna Grigorievna Dostoyevskaya:
- “Anna dear, my friend, my wife, forgive me, don't call me a scoundrel! I have committed a crime, I lost everything that you sent to me, all, to the last kreizer [small coin]. Yesterday I received the money, and I lost it yesterday right away! Anna, how could I look in your eyes now, what can you say about me? My friend, please do not guilt me completely! I hate my gambling, and I hated it yesterday and the day before, I damned it. As soon as got your money and changed the note, I went [to the casino] to win back at least something, to improve our circumstances. I believed so much in a small win! First, I lost a little, and once I began to lose, I wanted to win back, and I lost even more, then I had to continue playing to at least regain the money that we need to travel back, and finally, I lost everything ...” (May, 24<sup>th</sup>, 1867, Hamburg).

# Gambling in the Soviet Union

- There were only two legal gambling activities that were supported by the state: various types of national and local lotteries (the information on their revenues has been always classified) and betting on horse races. Millions of people participated in the lotteries even though the chances to win were low, but (as in most games) not equal to zero. During the Soviet era, any statistical data on gambling were not available. However, there is a lot of anecdotal evidence according to which it was a very widespread phenomenon.

# Gambling in the Soviet Union

- For instance, thousands of people participated in betting on horse races that was mainly gambling for the wealthy. Since some part of the Soviet economy was always controlled by the organized white collar criminals, those individuals were affluent enough to spend money at race tracks and to launder their illegal income via gambling. Some of them developed symptoms of pathological gambling, but compared to now, it was a minor societal issue.
- In addition, there were a lot of illegal professional gamblers (cheaters, card sharpers), whose areas of operation were airports, hotels, overnight trains, and train stations. Although sometimes they were arrested, most of them had a leisurely life. Big cities and southern resorts at the Black Sea had infamous places (“katran”) for illegal gambling where professional cheaters made extremely good money. And finally, millions of non-professionals played cards, including some very sophisticated games.

# “Lokhotron”

- There is one additional problem that emerged during the end of the Soviet era and is still proliferating in Russia. This is a kind of illegal gambling called slangy “lokhotron” (a gullible person, a fool to be taken advantage of). Criminal elements have been in control of that industry for a number of years. People at the market places, flea markets, airports, and other public places have been solicited and eventually become involved in a swindle that always seems to be very well orchestrated by the organized group of professional thieves.
- For example, in one of these scenarios, potential victims could be forced to play “numbers”, and he/she immediately wins substantial cash, then begins to lose and try to stop gambling. Someone from the crowd (a confederate) would exclaim: “I will bet for him/her! I know he is going to win a lot!” in order to reinforce further gambling. Finally, the victim of the scam loses thousands of dollars in a matter of minutes. The gambling technology is clear and simple: in all instances, victims are initially given an opportunity to get a big win and therefore a hope to win more. He or she is totally set up

# *Contemporary gambling industry*

- *The period 1988-1998*
- The gambling industry had begun at the dusk of the Soviet Russia in 1988. In 1991, there were three casinos and about 500 slot machines in the entire country. At the end of 1991, there were a few casinos in both Moscow and St. Petersburg. Three companies, *Nineviagrad ANO*, *Loiko*, and *Konti* later made up a major part of this business, and had started about that time. The industry included the manufacturing of equipment for casinos, and a few companies began to specialize in that area (*KSI*, *RIO*, *Unikum*).

# Contemporary gambling industry

- During next two years, a lot of new casinos and slot machine lounges were opened in Moscow and some other cities. The Association of Gaming Business was established to promote this type of enterprise in many regions of Russia.
- In 1994, according to the data from the Department of Taxation, the growth of this type of business was quite visible: in 87 out of 89 regions of Russia, 496 gambling companies were registered. For instance, 86 enterprises were developed in Moscow, 57 in St. Petersburg, 12 in Rostov, 7 in Vladivostok, 51 in Krasnodar territory (this is a resort area at the Black Sea), 14 in Stavropol territory (another resort area), 20 in Leningrad district (territory around St. Petersburg), 15 in Moscow district, 10 in Volgograd, and 9 in Murmansk district.

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- About 80,000 people were employed in this business.

# Contemporary gambling industry

*1998-2000*

- By the end of 1998, about 800 gambling establishments were in full operation in Russia. The Law #142-Φ3 that passed the State Duma (Parliament) “On taxes on gaming business” was quite helpful to monitor the growth in this industry. During 1998, the number of gambling places registered by the Department of taxation increased by 40%. By the end of that year, 1,402 gambling establishments were legally functioning in Russia, but by 2000, this number has doubled to 2,622 places. A total of 76 regions of Russia were involved in this rapidly growing industry. The slot machine industry had about 800 factories in 1998 and 2,100 factories in 1999. At the end of 2000, there were 2,700 gambling establishments with 120,000 employees.

# Contemporary gambling industry

2001-2006

- During 2001-2006, the gambling industry has become particularly strong and was equipped with the modern gambling equipment that was imported from various countries as well as produced by the Russian industry. Not only big cities, but also small towns and even fairly small villages have gotten at least some slot machine lounges. All establishments now must be licensed and over 6,300 licenses have been issued. Among the largest companies on the Russian market now are *Razio*, which manages slot machine enterprises such as *Vulkan*, *X-time*, and *Million*, as well as casino *Desperado* in Moscow. The company *Jackpot* controls the chains *Lackpot*, *Igrovoi Meshok*, and *Metrocenter* as well as casinos *Molodaya Gvardiya*, *Ibitsa*, and *Slavyanka* in Moscow. The company *Storm International* has a chain of clubs, *Superslots*, casinos *Udarnik*, *New York*, and *Karnaval* in Moscow and companies *Megatron*, and *RIO*. Among bookmakers, the most popular companies are *FON* and *Marathone*. It is difficult to rate casinos, although some experts would state that the level of service in such casinos such as *Metropol*, *Golden Palace*, *Kristal*, *Europe*, *A-Club*, *Asia*, *Corona*, *Metelitsa*, and *Shangri-La* is much higher than the level of many famous casinos in Europe, Asia, and Latin America.
- A number of people employed by the gambling industry has been consistently increasing: 150,000 in 2001, 200,000 in 2002, 300,000 in 2003, 500,000 in 2004, and in 2005-2006, over 550,000 people. In fact, this is a sizeable sector of the Russian economy

## Attitudes toward gambling were explored on the Russian sample by Kassinove, Tsytsarev and Davidson (1998)

- It was hypothesized that Russians would have positive attitudes toward many forms of gambling due to a widespread availability of gambling activities in their milieu, the promise of large payoffs, and the intermittent reinforcement underlying such games.
- In addition, it was believed that men would have significantly more positive attitudes than women, which has been found in the USA.
- The sample included 150 young male and female adults from various social groups in St. Petersburg.

## Attitudes toward gambling on the Russian sample by Kassinove, Tsytsarev and Davidson (1998) (cont)

- Five other variables were also assessed:
- 1) religion and religiosity were examined as it was expected the latter would be negatively related to the acceptance of gambling;
- 2) risk taking was expected to positively correlate to gambling attitudes;
- 3) liberal thinking as opposed to conservative thinking was expected to be associated with positive attitudes toward gambling;
- 4) it was hypothesized that individuals with previous gambling experience would have more positive gambling attitudes than would individuals who had no gambling experience; and
- 5) a measure of social desirability was included.

Attitudes toward gambling on the Russian sample by Kassinove, Tsytsarev and Davidson (1998) (cont)

- The results showed that in line with the hypotheses, Russian attitudes were found to be equally positive toward gambling in general, as well as toward the lottery, betting in casinos, and betting on horse races. The gender differences were minimal, and contrary to expectations, it was Russian women (rather than men) who reported more positive attitudes toward the lottery.

# Attitudes toward gambling

- As predicted, liberalism and risk taking were positively related to gambling activities. Russia is a country of turmoil and upheaval where taking a chance is a common, and even a necessary experience. As such, gambling is in line with the common person's perspective on acceptable behaviour. In addition, it seems logical that gambling attitudes would be found to be associated with liberal thinking, as viewed in Russia, since liberalism incorporates the acceptance of capitalism, a risky economic system.
- Finally, 74% of the Russian sample indicated they had gambled at some point in their lives. Those who previously gambled had more positive attitudes toward gambling in general, toward the lottery, casinos, and horse races. If more opportunities to gamble become available, it is likely that attitudes toward gambling will become even more positive. However, Russia is still going through rapid changes, and it is important to be cautious in making any conclusions. Most likely, the attitudes toward gambling will change one way or another along with economic, political, or cultural changes in Russia.

# *Pathological gambling: A Russian perspective*

- Only two recently published books on addictions have chapters on problem gambling, the content of which is mostly based on the Western research and some original small-scale studies (Mendelevich, 2007; Starshenbaum, 2006). However, they contain a lot of anecdotal evidence to support the hypothesis that in Russia, problem gambling is a cause of suicide, depression, and loss of status for hundreds of thousands of people from all socio-economic classes: some of them play in the fancy casinos while others gamble at very small gambling halls by their local subway stations. The authors have also confirmed a prediction that in Russia, gambling and alcoholism seem to be highly correlated although one can only speculate about the cause and effect relationships.

# Korolenko and Donskikh (1990) clinical definition

- Korolenko and Donskikh (1990) defined pathological gambling as a cluster of the following symptoms:
- Constant involvement, increase of time spent in gambling;
- Change of interests, motivational shift: suppression of other motivations by the craving for gambling;
- Loss of control that manifests in the lack of ability to stop gambling after both a big win and a series of losses;
- Psychological discomfort, irritability, and anxiety that occur during the short periods of time when they do not gamble. Such conditions resemble the withdrawal symptoms in substance abusers;
- Steady increase in frequency of gambling, tendency to experience the higher degree of risk;
- Periodically occurring states of tension accompanied by the drive for gambling and the desire to find a way to participate in it;
- Lack of ability to resist a temptation to gamble: any provocation leads to a relapse regardless of the verbal expressions of a decision to “quit forever”.
-

# Predisposing factors

- Among the factors that predispose people to gambling in Russia, the authors – psychiatrists who usually ignore environmental factors – admitted that the following factors have most potent effects on problem gambling:
  - upbringing in a dysfunctional family,
  - parents who participate in gambling (even in moderation),
  - very early signs of zest in childhood,
  - overestimation of the material factors in life, fixation on financial opportunities,
  - jealousy towards relatives and acquaintances who are rich, and
  - a strong believe that all problems could be resolved with the money (Korolenko & Dmitrieva, 2000).
- This listing of factors could be supplemented with the data obtained by Pasternak (1997) who considers an ethnic minority status, loss of family status, depression, and chemical dependencies.

# Zaitsev and Saidulina (2003): a concept of the gambling cycle

- Phase of abstention from gambling: This phase is characterized by non-participation in gambling behaviour due to lack of money, social pressure, and depression caused by another gambling misfortune.
- Phase of automatic fantasies about gambling: The gambler experiences a foretaste of winning, has fantasies in which he wins a lot, and suppresses thoughts of losses. Some fantasies occur spontaneously, but might be provoked by some cues.
- Phase of the progressively increasing tension: Depending on personal characteristics, the gambler experiences either melancholic depression or irritability and anger or anxiety. Sometimes the fantasies about gambling increase during this phase. The tension or anxiety often perceived by the individual as having nothing to do with gambling and is compensated by the increased libido and intellectual productivity.

# Gambling cycle (cont)

- The phase of making a decision to play; That could manifest either in acting out on his fantasies and self-reinforcing cognitive statements to justify a belief that “I am very likely to win now” or in an irrational decision to win back..
- The phase of suppression of a decision: The intensity of the conscious craving to gamble decreases and the illusion of control emerges. Usually, the patient is not completely aware when approaching the situation provoking gambling. Substantial amounts of cash in his hands, in addition to alcohol consumption, make him feel that he is able to gamble recreationally.
- The phase of realization of the decision made: This phase is characterized by intense emotional arousal, and lots of fantasies about the upcoming game. The irrational thoughts about his ability and likelihood to win prevail. The gambling does not end until all the money is lost. Then the phase of abstention begins and the new cycle starts.



# A motivational perspective

- The central concept in this model is **craving**. In our earlier research (Boky & Tsytsarev, 1987; Nemchin & Tsytsarev, 1989; Tsytsarev & Callahan, 1995; Tsytsarev & Gilinsky, 2004; Tsytsarev & Grodnitsky, 1995; Tsytsarev & Shiraev, 2005), we found that all cravings usually develop along the way as the motivational process unfolds: from the individual's basic need, to the goal object capable of satisfying it, and then to need satisfaction and finally to motivational tension reduction. To be defined as craving, the motivation is supposed to meet the following requirements:
  - 1. A significantly higher level of motivational tension, the individual typically experiences as arousal, emotional tension, frustration, discomfort, and the like, such that the basic need produces considerable strain;
  - 2. A perceived great attractiveness of the goal object deemed capable of satisfying the need and a wealth of opportunities, therefore;
  - 3. There are two groups of obstacles impeding access to the original goal object: a) objective barriers arising from the overt situation or environment, and b) subjective barriers resulting from personality traits or problems, the most common are poor self-esteem, lack of social skills, feeling of incompetence, and helplessness.

# A motivational perspective (cont)

- From this perspective, semantically, gambling as a form of addictive behaviour with gambling behaviour as a substitute object could be considered in the following ways:
- a) As a means of tension reduction: for example, in gamblers, tension associated with the frustration of the basic need could be reduced only via gambling behaviour – the substitute object.
- b) As a means of the temporary self-esteem growth: gambling may provide a strong feeling of self-confidence, and even omnipotence and grandiosity; fantasies at the card table provide the pseudo-satisfaction of the frustrated needs, and the gambler may see himself being loved, rich, important, and very successful.
- c) As a means of emotional state transformation and sensation seeking, obtaining unusual affective experience, escaping from emotional emptiness, and boredom: sensation seeking is one of the basic traits of gamblers who otherwise feel understimulated and are incapable to

# A motivational perspective (cont)

- d) As a means of compensation or substitution: a profound frustration of any need (e.g., the need for love, affiliation, power, control, or social achievement) results in excessive motivational tension and anger that can be compensated through the feeling of power and control that gamblers often experience before and during the anticipation of a big win as well as the rare episodes of winning.
- e) As a means of communication: gambling and other forms of addictive behaviour are an integral part of certain specific subcultures (for example, young and wealthy “new Russians”, criminals, and the like), wherein gambling serves as a sign of affiliation with the group, and the amount of cash used in gambling could be seen as a means of establishing a high status in a hierarchy of social relations.



## A motivational perspective (cont)

- Moreover, addictive behaviour substantially simplifies the complex emotional relationships within these groups. Some forms of gambling are commonly employed as a means of manipulation of others, and are aimed at achieving goals that are otherwise unattainable (to achieve certain status, to get attention of others). In other words, gamblers are involved in “games people play” as they are described in transactional analysis.

# A motivational perspective (cont)

- When analyzing different types of addictive behaviour, it is important to bear in mind that, initially, some kind of motivation (i.e., one of the frustrated needs), playing the role of a psychological predisposition to addictive or other abnormal behaviour, facilitates addictive manifestations.
- Reaching no satisfaction, it may become progressively more powerful and result in more intense craving and its respective expressions on the various levels of our mental and physical functioning.

# A motivational perspective (cont)

- The individual who becomes accustomed to using substitute objects such as various patterns of gambling to satisfy" one of these needs, thereby reducing the associated tension and frustration, may subsequently employ the same mode of gratification for the remainder of his/her frustrated needs.
- In other words, after having established a strong association between the initially frustrated need and gambling behaviour, the gambler continues to learn how to use gambling behaviour to help pseudo-satisfy other needs. Eventually, a number of important needs become associated with the substitute goal object that is the gambling behaviour.

# Treatment

- Based on this model, therapeutic strategies may include:
- Developing a therapeutic alliance and initial decrease of denial;
- Assessing the originally frustrated needs: development of the motivational path model for the client;
- Teaching the client to develop a hierarchy of goals and then to attain positive goals, which are subjectively important and socially appropriate;

# Treatment (cont)

- Developing an aversion to the substitute (gambling behaviour);
- Teaching the client how to experience need satisfaction and release of motivational tension without gambling;
- Positive therapy: teaching the client to experience positive feelings: joy and happiness without gambling;
- Behaviour therapy: reinforcing behaviours that lead to happiness and real need satisfaction on a systematic basis. Consistent self-monitoring, group therapy, and participation in Gamblers Anonymous could be recommended;
- Cognitive therapy: development of cognitive schemas in which only normal objects are seen attractive.

# Policies

- A most recent and quite radical decision of the State Duma was made in 2007. The new law prohibits any gambling activities within any settlements (cities, towns, villages) and should be moved to several gambling zones mainly located in the distant areas such as Siberia, Far East, and two zones in the European part of Russia.
- According to the law, the zones must be developed by July 2007, and all gambling establishments have to be relocated by July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2009. Only bookmakers will be allowed to function outside of the zones. This law also sets the minimal capital invested in each enterprise, minimal number of slot machines and card tables per establishment. In addition, all gambling activities via Internet will be prohibited. Experts believe that the Law exemplifies a compromise between the government and the gambling industry in Russia.

# Evaluation of the policies

- Criminologists are extremely skeptical and believe that most gambling establishments will become a part of underground shadow economy, and the outcomes of these measures will be eventually negative.
- The measures will give a way to the previously discussed “lokhotrons” to substitute legal gambling establishments.
- Furthermore, during the post-Soviet era, millions of people became involved in gambling: the affluent people in the expensive casinos, and the poor in the small one-handed bandit’s halls by subway stations. It would be logical to suppose that “gambling deprivation” is very likely to give birth to numerous forms of illegal gambling including and not limited to gambling on the internet, “lokhotrons” etc.
- Public opinion polls recently appeared on the Internet and support a negative perception of such measures as well. One of the publications is filled with the data on hundreds of already functioning illegal casinos in some regions of Russia (O’Flynn & Delany, 2007).

# Evaluation of the policies (cont)

- In summary, the American (“Las Vegas and Atlantic City” model) is unlikely to be a good alternative to the gambling industry in the big cities of Russia.
- Both sociologists and members of the business community are very pessimistic and predict a “replacement” of the legal gambling with the illegal forms of it.
- The epidemic of gambling is on the rise. Although the national gambling regulations seem to be strict and radical, there is only a slight probability that they will be properly enforced.
- Corruption of the governmental officials, resistance of the industry, great number of individuals who are already dependent on gambling, and those likely to vote against measures at the local levels, are the impediments for the new policies.

# Recommendations

- . The following areas need to be covered and the government is expected to support the research programmes:
- Epidemiology of gambling behaviour in general, and problem gambling in particular, to obtain reliable statistical data on prevalence and incidence of gambling, high risk groups, and protective factors;
- Clinical phenomenology, etiology, pathogenesis, neurochemistry, and pharmacology as well as cultural variations of gambling (Russia is a multicultural society). The clinicians' understanding of clinical aspects gambling in Russia is very similar to our understanding of alcoholism in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: only extremely severe forms of the addiction with numerous social, psychological, and physical consequences (including delirium tremens and suicidal behaviour) are taken into serious consideration, whereas the focus in research and clinical interventions should be on the early identification and mechanisms of gambling behaviour, including early intervention;
- Developing the empirically-based interventions including telephone hotlines for gamblers, cognitive and behavioural therapies for both inpatient and outpatient settings, therapeutic communities, some analogues of 12-step programmes, and psychopharmacological treatment for comorbid disorders.

# Recommendations (cont)

- In addition to the research, on the societal level, the following measures need to be taken:
- To develop the health care facilities for pathological gamblers, and to improve training in the area of behavioural addictions for mental health professionals (psychiatrists, clinical psychologists, social workers etc.) in the empirically-based treatment. It would seem logical for the government to make the gambling enterprises financially responsible to support treatment programmes for pathological gamblers throughout the country;
- To implement gambling prevention measures, addressed but not limited to adolescents and young adults in public and private schools, colleges, and universities;
- To conduct mandatory anti-gambling propaganda in the media, public places, and all gambling establishments (theses messages should be included in any commercials advertising gambling).

# Thank you

- See you in Russia!