Factors influencing treatment-seeking behavior in female pathological gamblers – A comparison of different treatment centers in Europe: *Austria, Germany & Italy*

Laura BRANDT
Medical University of Vienna
Center for Public Health
Vienna, Austria

Andrea WÖHR
Hohenheim University
Gambling Research Center
Stuttgart, Germany

Fulvia PREVER
Azzardo e Nuove Dipendenze Association
Milano, Italy
Background: Gambling expenditure in the general population

Amount spent on gambling by EU households in 2006 in Euro

- **The gambling industry is growing**
- **Austria, Germany and Italy** are among the European countries with the highest amount spent on gambling

*Kreutzer, Fischer & Partner, 2007*
## Gambling participation in the general population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>48,0</td>
<td>47.0</td>
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<td>Women</td>
<td>36,5</td>
<td>42,0</td>
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<td>Men</td>
<td>47,4</td>
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Kalke et al. (2011). *Suchttherapie, 12*(S 01), PO05.
IPSAD-Italia Italian Population Survey on Alcohol and Drugs
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## Pathological Gambling (PG) prevalence

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<td>Total</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
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<td>Men</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>1.1</td>
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- Around one third of PGs are women ➔ Recent development: The gender-gap is narrowing down: 0.7% male & 0.4% female (US data)

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## Prevalence by gender and severity

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* At-risk gamblers: 1-2 DSM-IV criteria for Pathological Gambling  
** Pathological gamblers: 3-4 DSM-IV criteria  
***Severe pathological gamblers: >5 DSM-IV criteria

*Table adopted from Zanki & Fischer, 2012*
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Telescoping Effect

- Significant differences in the development and progression of alcohol and drug problems among men and women
  
  - Women have been shown to start at an older age than men but exhibit an accelerated progression from use to abuse
  
  - All stages of gambling leading to pathology progress faster in women compared to men


Potential factors influencing the increase in female gambling

- Female advertisement
  - Gambling becomes more attractive to females

- Online gambling
  - Private
  - 24/7 available

- „Emancipation“
  - Women is not just Lad Luck anymore

- Gender gap may be narrowing with the widespread legalization of gambling
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→ Increasing appeal of gambling for women but also normalisation
→ Only one ingredient of problem gambling!
Differences in male and female gambling motives

- **Female motives**
  - Social reasons → to escape loneliness/isolation → shift from social to problem gambling
  - Avoidance strategy in response to life event stressors (escape from personal and/or familial problems)
  - Prefer non-strategic games (slot machines, scratch cards, bingo)

- **Male motives**
  - Sensation-seeking or avoidance/reduction of dysphoric mood (like loneliness or boredom)
  - Excitement and financial gain
  - Social aspect → Gambling/winning/loosing is intrinsically linked to how males are seen by others
  - Prefer strategic games (poker, sports bets...)

Treatment seeking/access

- 7%-12% of PGs ever seeked professional help (Slutske, 2006)
- Treatment institutions are often ‘male environments’ → 10-15% women in treatment institutions

What are factors that might influence treatment-seeking behavior in female pathological gamblers?

The treatment institutions/data sources

Austria

The Gambling Helpline operated by the Addiction Clinic of the Medical University of Vienna, offers telephone counseling to problematic and pathological gamblers and their relatives, the purpose of which is to provide quick, uncomplicated, and, if necessary, anonymous help.

→ Diagnostic assessment via standardized questionnaire

Germany

Data on pathological gamblers are provided by Bado e.V., which comprises several welfare organisations (freie Drogenhilfeträger) from the city state of Hamburg and the national authority for consumer protection (Behörde für Gesundheits- und Verbraucherschutz).

→ Standardized documentation of outpatient help centers from Hamburg, Germany
The treatment institutions/data sources

**Italy**

The general purpose of the Azzardo e Nuove Dipendenze Association is to give useful elements to strengthen, whenever possible, the interventions in the sector of pathological gambling.

Data were derived from the members of the womens-group which is in place since 2011.

Data sources vary considerably: Data not readily comparable, but give insight from different angles
Potential treatment barriers

- Stigma, shame & guilt ⇒ women view addiction/gambling more negatively and are more concerned about social stigma
- Children ⇒ fear of losing custody, fear of prosecution; lack of available, affordable childcare
- Inadequate health insurance, poverty
- Less likely than males to have active social support
- Fear of hospitalization
- PG in women associated with internalizing behaviors such as anxiety and depression
- Treatment entry is less facilitated by social institutions (employers or criminal justice system) for women
- Finding appropriate treatment services ⇒ Lack of information; availability
Ambivalence

- Gambling offers the feeling of being able to alter consciousness but in a perceived controlled way
  - The ability to manage the everyday life remains intact (at least for a while)
  - Female gamblers are frequently survivors of abuse or domestic violence
  - Frequently history of self-harm or eating disorders
  - Strong need for perceived control → gambling as a form of coping mechanism that works (for a while)

Conclusion – Implications for practice

- Education and training of health practitioners (especially GPs)
- Adequate information for affected women (including information on financial situation & children)
- Treatment should be tailored to individual needs, ideally with a multi-disciplinary approach → including adequate diagnosis and early treatment of co-mobidities
- Gender-sensitive treatment approach!
Thank you for your attention!

laura.brandt@meduniwien.ac.at