

*EASG 12<sup>th</sup> European Conference on Gambling Studies and Policy Issues, Valletta, Malta, September 11-14, 2018*

# High Return To Player (RTP): A risk factor for problem gambling?

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# Return To Player (RTP) definition

**The percentage of  
wagered money  
paid back to players,  
over time**

# Research on RTP

- **No specific research on RTP in relation to PG**
- **This is a conceptual discussion**
  - Previous general discussions on RTP and PG: Parke (2010); Parke, Parke & Blaszczynski (2016), ch. 7\*
- **Previous research on RTP (not PG-related)**
  - Slot machines, can players detect different RTP-levels?
  - Players' knowledge about RTP levels
  - Consumer issues, informed choice
  - Economic studies on price of gambling and consumption of gambling

\* Parke, J. (2010). *Payback percentage and problem gaming: A critical review of the literature*. Brussels: European Gaming and Betting Association; Parke, J., Parke, A., & Blaszczynski, A. (2016). *Key issues in product-based harm minimization*. London: Sophro.

# Typical RTP percentages



Traditional lotteries	50%
Sports pool games	65%
Bingo in bingo hall	70%
Online bingo	80%
Horse betting (win)	80% - 90%
Online sports betting	90% - 98%
Roulette (European)	97,3%
Electronic Gaming Machines (EGMs)	90% - 99%



**High RTP → High PG risk**

**Claimed or believed by ...**

**... some gambling companies**

(e.g. the Swedish ATG)

**... PG risk assessment instruments**

(Gamgard, TGR)

**... governmental inquiries**

(e.g. Swedish SOU 2005:21 and SOU 2008:124)

**... governmental responses to EU complaints about  
gambling monopolies**

(France)

**But many others are skeptical.**

# EGMs, roulette, Black Jack, poker and other interactive high-RTP games

- RTP cannot be significantly lowered (players would lose interest)
- High RTP is a fundamental component of these gambling forms



- These other components are without doubt PG risk factors
- Little suggests that high RTP *in itself* is a risk factor (it is rather a proxy variable for PG risk)
- Pointless for gambling policy to consider the level of RTP in these forms of gambling
- Policy options: regulate other features of these forms of gambling, or forbid (might be unrealistic)

# Lotteries, pool games, bingo, sports- and horse betting

*An increase in RTP level may ...*

**INCREASE  
PG RISK**

**DECREASE OR  
NOT AFFECT  
PG RISK**

**LOW PRICE, MORE PEOPLE GAMBLE**

**SEVERE PGs ARE RELATIVELY PRICE  
INSENSITIVE (GAMBLE UNTIL ALL IS LOST)**

**GAMBLING SESSIONS MAY  
BECOME LONGER**

**LOW PRICE OF LOW RISK GAMES MAY DRAW  
PLAYERS FROM HIGH RISK GAMES**

**BIGGER/ MORE FREQUENT WINS  
(REINFORCE GAMBLING BEHAVIOR)**

**GAMBLERS LOSE LESS MONEY, IF NET  
EXPENSE DOES NOT INCREASE MUCH**

# Closing remarks

- High return to player (RTP) percentage is, in itself, not likely to have a significant impact on problem gambling
- Future directions: natural experiments are possible when RTP is significantly lowered or increased.
- Studies on players' net and gross expenses on gambling would be valuable – when and why do players feel “satiated” and end a gambling session?



# The anthropology of gambling

[www.ongambling.org](http://www.ongambling.org)



*The early phase of this study was financed by the Public Health Agency of Sweden.*



*The later phase is conducted within the Regaps research program, financed by ...*



*... The Swedish Research Council for Health, Working Life and Welfare*



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