

Early identification and intervention by significant others: A further approach for indicative prevention of gambling disorders?

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As universal and selective prevention have limited effectiveness and high costs...

- Early identification might be the method of choice to prevent harm
- Early identification by significant others including early self recognition and non-formal interventions might be a further effective prevention strategy

But: Does it work?

(1) Low relative risk for developing a gambling disorder (GD)

- * Risk for GD after first experiences with gambling about 0,5 %, compared to about 30 % for nicotine, 15 % for alcohol ^[1]
- * About 1/3 of individuals with life-time GD recover without formal treatment ^[2]
 - Low societal legitimation for prohibition-related regulations to protect a minority, and prohibition has negative side-effects

(2) Challenges for universal and selective prevention

- * Universal prevention expensive and up to now not effective
- * Selective prevention (risk groups) difficult because of complex interaction of individual vulnerability, environmental factors and gambling characteristics
 - Low cost-effectiveness of these approaches

(3) Consequently: additional focus on indicative prevention (early identification)

Two current approaches:

- * Observation of problem gambling behavior by venue staff
- * Monitoring of problem gambling markers in interactive gambling
 - Late interventions in the process to develop GD
 - Need for earlier action



(1) Are significant others able to recognize early indicators of problem development?

- * What indicators, and early enough?
- * Do significant others intervene, and how?
- * Are interventions effective?

(2) Are gamblers able to recognize own early indicators of problem development and modify their behavior?

- * What indicators, and early enough?
- * Do such gamblers develop self-regulation to reduce harm?

(3) If feasible: how to support utilization and effectiveness

(1) Narrative review of current evidence

- Database search (PubMed, PsycARTICLES, PsycINFO, Web of Science Core Collection)

(2) Pilot Study: 30 structured interviews on early recognition and intervention by significant others or by self-recognition

- N = 12 subjects with current GD
- N = 4 with no history of GD, but 1 - 4 criteria are met at one point in time
- N = 14 with history of recovery from GD or problem gambling

(3) Munich Leisure Time Study

- N=94 with frequent gambling (male, 18-26)
- Open ended questions , online study

Cave: convenience samples of subjects !

5.1. Are significant others able to recognize early indicators of problem development?

(1) Findings from narrative review

Evidence: 1 literature review [5], 4 single papers [3, 4, 6, 7]

Summary of Findings:

- Significant others often don't seem to identify early indicators, as the person concerned conceals problems [3, 4]
- Partners are often the first, followed by family, friends [5]
- Significant others recognize above all social withdrawal and financial problems [6, 7]

5.1. Are significant others able to recognize early indicators of problem development?

(2) Findings from pilot study

Family

- In 80 % (24/30) a family member was aware of the gambling activities
- 79 % of them (19/24) was aware of a problem development

- Reasons: confession by gambler after having concealed it (9); by accident (3), financial problems (3); social withdrawal (2)

Citations ¹:

- *“My parents recognized that I got gambling problems because I got no time to meet them and if I met them I always asked for money.” (patient-no. N01.03)*
- *“When I told my mum that I gamble but that it was all under control and I’ve got no problems, she believed me.” (patient-no.20)*

1: Citations are translated from German

5.1. Are significant others able to recognize early indicators of problem development?

(2) Findings from pilot study

Friends

- Friends were aware of the gambling activities in 67 % (20/30) of cases
- 60 % (12/20) of these friends were aware of a problem development
- Reasons: friends were gambler themselves (4), confession by gambler (3)
- *“Others recognized that I got a real problem, but they didn’t get what it was and they probably never thought that it was gambling.” (patient-no. N01.03)*
- *“If I hadn’t told my friends and my Ex-girlfriend that I got no money because of gambling, they would never have noticed my problem.”(patient-no. N01.06)*

5.1. Are significant others able to recognize early indicators of problem development?

(2) Findings from pilot study

Partner

- 80 % (24/30) live/had lived in a relationship during a problematic period
- In 92 % (22 /24) partner knew about gambling & a problem development
- Reasons: confession by gambler (10); partner were gambler themselves (3); financial problems (3) & social withdrawal (2); watching gambler whilst gambling (1)
- *“My wife realized that we got into financial problems and that I’m lying to her nearly every day, and the conflicts increased.”(patient-no. 9)*
- *“Someday I lost all my money, so I had to ask her for cash and to tell her everything. Before , she had noticed nothing.” (patient-no. N01.06)*

5.1. Are significant others able to recognize early indicators of problem development?

(2) Findings from pilot study

Work

- 27 % (8/30) gamblers reported about their workplace
- In 38 % (3/8) colleagues knew about gambling & a problem development
- Reasons: confession by gambler to justify disruptions (2), colleague was gambler himself (1)
- *“At work nobody noticed that I am involved in gambling activities.”
(patient-no. N01.03)*
- *“I had a colleague who was gambling, too. Sometimes we went gambling in the lunch break.” (patient-no. N01.02)*

5.1. Are significant others able to recognize early indicators of problem development?

(3) Findings from the Munich Leisure Time Study

- Recognition by others in 9 of 94 cases (10%)
 - * Partner (3), friends (3), family (2), colleague (1)
- Majority (7 cases) of participants didn't agree with the opinion
- Participants reactions depended on situation and kind of relation (positive vs. negative)
- Only in one case the recognition resulted in a specific plan for change

5.2. Are gamblers able to recognize own early indicators of problem development and modify their behavior?

(1) Findings from narrative review

Evidence: 2 literature reviews [5, 8], 3 single papers [9, 10, 11]

Summary of findings:

1. Delay between problem onset and self-recognition [8]
2. Discrepancy between objective measures and self-perception of existent gambling problems or GD [9, 10]
3. Retrospectively reported first indicators were preoccupation and chasing losses [11]
4. Individuals with problem gambling less report social withdrawal, but rather financial and psychological problems [5]

5.2. Are gamblers able to recognize own early indicators of problem development and modify their behavior?

(2) Findings from pilot study (n = 30)

- First recognition: the gambler himself
- Crucial moments for realizing a problem development: **financial problems** (10), problems with others (e.g. lying) (2), preoccupation and psychological distress (2)
- *“Someday I waged everything I had and on the next day I hadn't even money for food.” (patient-no. 01)*
- *“One day I had an argument with my wife about gambling right in front of our child.” (patient-no. 5)*
- *“Gambling became the most important thing in my life! I lost interest in every other thing.”(patient-no. 7)*

5.2. Are gamblers able to recognize own early indicators of problem development and modify their behavior?

(2) Findings from pilot study (n = 30)

Which indicators were perceived?

1. Financial problems, debts (20)
2. Neglect important things (relationships, work, activities) (15)
3. Increasing stakes (8)
4. Psychological changes (e.g. aggressiveness, depressed mood) (8)
5. Spending a lot of time on gambling (8)
6. Preoccupation (6)
7. Lying (6)
8. Parallel existence with focus on game (6)
9. Losing control (6)
10. Desire, craving (5)
11. Chasing losses (5)

5.2. Are gamblers able to recognize own early indicators of problem development and modify their behavior?

(2) Findings from pilot study

Do gamblers modify their behavior?

Reported reactions after recognizing a problem development:

- Gambling with a fixed budget (2) / without cash card (1)
- Trial to reduce frequency of gambling (1)
- Looking for a counseling service (1)
- stop borrowing more money (1)

- (1) The social environment (except workplace) and the individual gambler seem to recognize early indicators of problem development
- (2) Early indicators are financial problems and social withdrawal
- (3) Subjects started various measures to control problem gambling
- (4) Relevance and effectiveness of this approach is not known

- (1) Preliminary results indicate that early identification and intervention by significant others and measures for self control might be a successful prevention approach
- (2) Further research is needed:
 - * to identify the development of early (patterns of) indicators
 - * to test the effectiveness of nonprofessional (self-) control measures

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