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The article appeared on the site *Studentproblems.com*, which describes itself as “Europe’s biggest and fastest growing student community”.

Mel Ramsay

# Student gambling addiction is a real problem and we need to talk about it



*There's help out there.*

When you picture a gambler, you probably think of someone huddled over a gambling machine in a bookies<sup>1</sup>. You might picture them as an older person, desperately trying to get their next big win. But the traditional bookies isn't just where gambling happens anymore. Times have  
5 changed, and so have the people who gamble.

In the UK, 156,000 people who are addicted to gambling are between the age of 16-24. Even more shocking is the fact that there are 60,000 problem gamblers between the ages of 11 and 15. Of course, it's illegal to bet until you're 18. However, three million 13- to 17-year-olds have created falsified online betting accounts.

10 The movement of gambling to online has raised some serious issues. Income from online casinos, online poker and online bingo was just £817 million in 2009, but it has now reached

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<sup>1</sup> bookmaker (slang)

£4.5 billion, making up more than a third of the industry. It's big business, but also causing huge issues.

15 100,000 UK students have some form of gambling debt, with 1 in 8 missing classes due to betting. The sad fact is that many students use this as a way of covering living costs. Almost 1 in 10 have used all or some of their student loan to gamble.

We spoke to Nick, a former gambling addict who has lost around £50,000 due to online betting and casinos. He said: "I knew when I'd get paid, and I'd stay up late, I'd stay up until midnight or 1am just so I could get that fix. Maybe I'd be gambling for a couple of days, and then the rest of  
20 the month I'd have nothing. Then you're just waiting and waiting for that next payment. Why would you put yourself in these situations? A normal thinking person wouldn't but you're not thinking straight are you?"

He added: "We've looked at how much I've lost over the years. It's hard to really pinpoint it with accounts being closed, owing money to companies and stuff like that but I don't know, excess  
25 of £50,000? That's hard to put into perspective. If I didn't have that, where I would be, what could I have?"

Matt Zarb-Cousin is a former student gambling addict, but now he is the spokesman for *The Campaign for Fairer Gambling*<sup>3</sup>. He said: "It's the delusion that you can win it all back. There is no other addiction where the person affected believes that by continuing to engage in the  
30 activity they're addicted to, it can solve all the problems that the addiction has created. This, above all, is what makes it so dangerous."

He added: "For the betting companies, a condition of their licence to operate is to protect the young and the vulnerable and to prevent harm, but unfortunately far too much of their profits are coming from people with gambling problems. That shows that the industry is far too reliant  
35 on people who have a gambling addiction."

In fact, some statistics show that 4% of gamblers are contributing to 78% of gambling profits.

It's not just the money that people are losing, as one in five problem gamblers attempt suicide. That is twice as many as people with other addictions. Sadly, there's a chronic lack in services for gambling addicts. Just one specialist clinic in the UK is provided by the NHS<sup>4</sup>. Many young  
40 addicts become isolated, as they don't want to talk to friends or family about their addiction.

Nick explained: "I can't remember how many lies I've had to create, and the amount of times I've deceived family and friends. They're what really makes you happy, not this. But they're not

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<sup>2</sup> excess of: mere end

<sup>3</sup> *The Campaign for Fairer Gambling*: non-profit organisation, som arbejder for lovgivning og mere gennemskuelighed inden for gambling

<sup>4</sup> *National Health Service*: det britiske sundhedsvæsen

there the whole time, [gambling] can be there the whole time, you have access to it 24/7. You can message a person every now and again, but it doesn't give you that same feeling."

- 45 However, it seems that things are changing. A campaign has just been passed to reduce Fixed Odds Betting Terminal<sup>5</sup> (FOBT betting) to a maximum of £2 per spin, rather than £100.

The amount that British gamblers lose on FOBTs has increased by 73% since 2009, from £1 billion to £1.8 billion, despite the number of machines rising by just 9% over the same period to 34,388. These numbers show that people are losing bigger amounts.

- 50 William Hill<sup>6</sup> has also launched a campaign called "Nobody Harmed", and has recognised problem gambling as an issue.

Nick has now blocked himself from all betting sites. He said: "Back in the day, I'd ban my accounts but I could never click that indefinite button<sup>7</sup>. It would always be a month ban, or six month ban, or 12 month ban."

- 55 "You have to click that button where you're not allowed to ever go back onto these sites. That's the hardest thing you'll do but it's also the best thing."

Remember, when the fun stops – stop.

(2019)

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<sup>5</sup> *Fixed Odds Betting Terminal*: elektronisk spilleautomat med faste odds

<sup>6</sup> *William Hill*: bettingfirma

<sup>7</sup> *click that indefinite button*: (her) endegyldigt slette mine spilkonti