

# **Independent Gambling Authority**

## **Social Effects Inquiry 2011**

### **Submission by Victim Support Service Inc. (February 2011)**

#### ***About Victim Support Service Inc.***

Victim Support Service (VSS) is the oldest and largest non-government crime victims' service in Australia. We are a not for profit community-based organisation that works in partnership with communities, police and other organisations. VSS is a South Australian state-wide service, which currently consists of a main office in Adelaide and seven country regional offices.

A broad range of services are provided including services for adults who have suffered as a result of a criminal offense. This includes individual crime victims, their families, friends and the wider community. Services for victims of crime are free and confidential.

#### ***The Impact of Gambling upon crime and victims of crime***

Victim Support Service, as a provider of services to victims of crime, has a vested interest in the process of addressing the social effects of gambling on the community.

There are many social indicators that support the belief that there are significant relationships between crime and gambling. Some such crimes include offences such as fraud, theft and robbery to support gambling addictions. Committing other offences such as assault and domestic violence may also correlate with gambling addictions.

Whilst it is very difficult to establish the exact figures around the connections between gambling and crime, some of the statistics involving the social impacts and criminal behaviours of gamblers is listed below.

- In 2003 the Australian Institute of Criminology & Price Waterhouse Cooper examined 183 fraud offenders. This was discussed in Sakurai & Smith (2003) where they indicated that 14.7% stated that gambling was the motivation for their offending behaviour.
- A survey of 144 spouses of compulsive gamblers found 50% were physically and verbally abused by spouse and 12% had attempted suicide. (Bland, Newman, Orn & Stebelski, 1993, Canada)
- In 2003 the Independent Gambling Authority commissioned a report into gambling and crime in South Australia in conjunction with OSCAR (Office of Crime Statistics and Research). In this report the Authority highlighted the insufficiency of statistics

kept showing the full impact of gambling upon crime. The reasons given for this lack of statistics include

- A number of offences will never be detected,
- Even if detected, offences may not be reported to police,
- Not all problem gamblers attend treatment services, and
- Not all gamblers who access services will disclose criminal activities.

However, this report highlighted the percentage of prisoners in Australian prisons who were assessed as problem gamblers. It varied from state to state, however the highest was in South Australia where 33% were assessed to be in this category. (Marshall & Marshall, 2003)

Whilst the main studies into the relationship between gambling and crime to date have involved the study of offenders, Victim Support Service and other providers of services to victims are required to address gambling from a different perspective. It is evident that gambling does inherently impact on crime, and providers of support services should be involved in addressing the social impact on those victims.

In many ways the families and friends of problem gamblers are in their own ways victims, not necessarily of crime, but of the impact left behind by gambling. In a report into the relationship between crime and pokie machines, conducted by the Department of Justice in Victoria, they reported that up to 70% of problem gamblers may commit crimes. (Statistics taken from "*Pokie tie to Crime*", **Sydney Herald Sun**, Sunday November 28, 2010). However the impacts do not solely occur to families and friends of problem gamblers. Recently there has also been an increased number of crimes against Pokie/Hotel venues by armed offenders, and increased attacks such as aggravated robberies against the gamblers themselves.

So, in many ways gambling, gamblers and licensed venues are intricately involved in crimes on many different levels, as targets, as criminals and as innocent bystanders.

In addition it is our experience that for some people who have been a victim of crime and subsequently experience post-traumatic stress reactions that they may rely on different forms of gambling as a coping strategy. For example, many clients report a reliance on 'pokies' as a strategy for coping with what has happened to them, however this then often leads to additional financial pressure and emotional stress being placed on the individual and/or family of the victim.

## *Recommendations*

Victim Support Service believes that a collaborative interagency approach is required to decrease the impact upon victims involved in the cycle that is problem gambling. This will involve a partnership between many agencies to provide a combined crime prevention strategy. We propose that this includes, but is not limited to:

- Early intervention and programmes to develop restorative approaches and victim awareness
- Anti-gambling education and awareness campaigns
- Education, self esteem and skills of 'at risk' groups and during life transition points
- Parental education & intervention in 'at risk' groups, and
- Improved, targeted & effective offender rehabilitation.

Some of the recommendations or considerations that need to be addressed to decrease the probability and impact of crime include –

- a. Increased security for venues after dark including,**
  - i. secure access to vehicles,
  - ii. well lit parking areas for all venues,
  - iii. increased taxi access points,
  - iv. requirement for security CCTV in all venues, and
  - v. security personnel at all venues with gambling facilities.
- b. Increased awareness programs for gamblers and greater access to support services, including support services advertised on every machine and in every venue,**
- c. Increased awareness for venue staff addressing,**
  - i. limits to cash amounts given to gamblers after gambling, and
  - ii. ability to detect suspicious behaviour of others in venues.
- d. Increased advertising showing support services for non-gamblers affected by gambling,**
  - i. Increased advertising to highlight behaviours related to problem gambling,
  - ii. Increased access to, and advertising of, services available in local areas (in particular country South Australia).
- e. Increased funds / grants available to support services working with,**
  - i. Offenders who highlight gambling as reason for offending,
  - ii. victims of crime with problem gambling habits, and
  - iii. families and friends of gamblers.
- f. Support services in prisons available to offenders to address gambling during incarceration.**
- g. Restorative justice approaches to offenders who commit crime to support problem gambling.**

## **References**

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