



# The **O**hio **S**ubstance **A**buse **M**onitoring Network

January 2002 – June 2002

A Rapid Response  
Investigation

## **RAPID RESPONSE: ALCOHOL/DRUG ABUSE & COMPULSIVE GAMBLING**

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A Rapid Response Report Prepared for the  
Ohio Department of Alcohol  
and Drug Addiction Services

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In Collaboration with [Wright State University](#) &  
[The University of Akron](#)

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**THE OHIO SUBSTANCE ABUSE MONITORING NETWORK**

**JUNE 2002**



**Ohio Department of Alcohol  
and Drug Addiction Services**

**Ohio Department of Alcohol and  
Drug Addiction Services  
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**Alcohol/Drug Abuse and Compulsive Gambling**  
**(Akron and Canton, Ohio)**

An OSAM Rapid Response Report Prepared for the Ohio Department of Alcohol  
and Drug Addiction Services

January 2002 – June 2002

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## ABSTRACT

The relationship between alcohol/drug addiction and compulsive gambling is a complicated one. Six individual interviews with recovering addicts/gamblers, and focus groups consisting of 38 treatment professionals and 6 criminal defense lawyers (specializing in drug and gambling cases) were conducted in the Summit-Stark County region. Cocaine, heroin, and alcohol use were most closely related to those with gambling problems. For some, gambling was an alternative economy that was *intended* to be used as a funding source of personal and family income. Gambler/addict respondents described a number of personal and family problems related to their gambling behaviors, whether they were using drugs at the time, or not. Some respondents believed that their gambling problems increased when they stopped using drugs and alcohol. In general, treatment programs in this region do not assess for gambling problems, nor do they offer services for those with compulsive gambling problems. It was mentioned that some facilities receive operating funds from gambling events.

## INTRODUCTION

### 1. Area Description

Summit County Ohio, located in northeast Ohio, had a population of 542,899, according to the 2000 census. Approximately 83.5 % of county's residents are white, 13.2 % are black, and other ethnic/racial groups constitute the remaining 3.3 percent. The median household income of Summit County residents is estimated to be \$42,304. Approximately 9.9% of all people of all ages in Summit County are living in poverty, and approximately 16.8% of all children under age 18 live in poverty. Approximately 40% of the people in Summit County reside in the city of Akron, with a 2000 population of 217,074. Summit County contains several other incorporated cities. The largest of these cities is Cuyahoga Falls (containing approximately 9% of the population of Summit County), followed by Stow (6%), Barberton (5%), Green (4%), and Hudson (4%). The rest of Summit County's inhabitants live in smaller towns and townships.

Stark County had a 2000 population of 378,098. The largest city, Canton, listed 80,806 residents in the 2000 census. Approximately 90.3 % of Stark county residents are white, 7.2% are black and 3.5% are of other ethnic groups. The median household income for Stark County is estimated to be \$38,323 (2000 census). Approximately 10.5% of all people of all ages in Stark County are living in poverty, and approximately 15.8% of all children under age 18 live in poverty (2000 census). Approximately 23% of the people in Stark County reside in the city of Canton. Stark County contains two other incorporated cities, Massillon (containing approximately 8% of the population of Stark County) and Alliance, which contains approximately 6% of the population. The rest of the inhabitants of Stark County live in surrounding villages and townships.

## 2. Data Sources and Time Periods

- **Qualitative data** were collected through 5 treatment provider focus groups and 6 individual interviews conducted during April 2002-June 2002. Number and type of participants are described in Tables 1 and 2.
- **Gambling raids and arrest information** were taken from the Internet web sites of the Akron Beacon Journal and the Summit County Sheriff's Office

**Table 1: Qualitative Data Sources**

### Totals

Total Number of Focus Groups	Total Number of Focus Group Participants	Total Number of Individual Interviews	Total Number of Participants
5	38	6	44

### Focus Groups

Date of Focus Group	Number of Participants	Active Drug Users or Frontline Professionals (Type: counselor, police officer, social worker, etc.)
5/2/2002	6	Criminal Defense Attorneys
5/8/2002	10	Residential Tx Supervisors
5/15/2002	8	AoD Counselors/Administrators
5/22/2002	8	AoD Counselors/Nurse/Administrators
5/30/2002	6	AoD Counselors/Administrators

### Individual Interviews

Date of Individual Interview	Type of Participant
5/6/01	Compulsive Gambler/Recovering Alcoholic
5/14/2002	Compulsive Gambler/Recovering Addict/AoD Worker
5/17/2002	Compulsive Gambler/Recovering Addict/AoD Worker
5/22/2002	Compulsive Gambler/AoD Rehab Client
5/22/2002	Compulsive Gambler/ AoD Rehab Client
5/22/2002	Compulsive Gambler/ AoD Rehab Client

**Table 2: Detailed Focus Group/Individual Interview Information**

**Focus Groups**

1. May 2, 2002 – Criminal Defense Lawyers

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Experience / Background</b>	<b>Age</b>
White	Male	Criminal Defense Attorney/ Recovering Alcoholic-19 years	55
White	Male	Criminal Defense Attorney	33
A-A	Male	Criminal Defense Attorney	40
White	Male	Criminal Defense Attorney	36
White	Male	Criminal Defense Attorney	52
White	Male	Criminal Defense Attorney	39

2. May 8, 2002 – Female Supervisors, Residential AoD Rehabilitation Facility

<b>Primary Drug</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Age</b>
N/A	White	F	33
N/A	A-A	F	40
N/A	A-A	F	38
N/A	A-A	F	36
N/A	White	F	54
N/A	A-A	F	45
N/A	A-A	F	44
N/A	A-A	F	36
N/A	White	F	45

3. May 15, 2002- Canton AOD Treatment Providers and Administrators

<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Primary Drug</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Age</b>
AOD counselor	N/A	CAUC	F	55
CEO-Quest Recovery Services	N/A	CAUC	M	70
Director of Jail Tx Services	N/A	CAUC	F	32
Director Adult OP Service	N/A	CAUC	F	56
SAMI Therapist	N/A	CAUC	M	40
SAMI Therapist	N/A	CAUC	F	41
Director – Canton ADAS Board	N/A	CAUC	M	52
Program Director – ADAS Board	N/A	CAUC	M	52

4. May 16, 2002 -Detox Clients

<b>Connection to drug community</b>	<b>Primary Drugs</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>
Detox Client	Narcotics	Cauc	M	39
Detox Client	Opiates/OxyContin	Cauc	M	42
Detox Client	Heroin/OxyContin	Cauc	F	55
Detox Client	ETOH, Cocaine, Opiates	Cauc	M	37
Detox Client	ETOH	Cauc	M	33

5. May 22, 2002

<b>Age</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Experience / Background</b>
NA	White	M	Clinical Director-AoD Residential Tx Center
NA	Af-Amer	F	Chemical Dependency Counselor
NA	White	F	Chemical Dependency Counselor
NA	White	F	Chemical Dependency Counselor
NA	White	M	Registered Nurse
NA	White	F	Chemical Dependency Counselor
NA	White	M	Chemical Dependency Counselor
NA	White	M	Chemical Dependency Counselor

6. May 30, 2002

<b>Age</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Experience / Background</b>
33	White	F	Chemical Dependency Counselor
39	White	M	Chemical Dependency Counselor
46	White	M	Chemical Dependency Counselor
54	White	M	Chemical Dependency Counselor
42	White	M	Chemical Dependency Counselor
48	White	F	Chemical Dependency Counselor

## Individual Interviews

1. May 6, 2002

Primary Drug	Primary Gambling	Ethnicity	Sex	Age
ETOH	Casino	White	M	55

2. May 14, 2002

Primary Drug	Primary Gambling	Ethnicity	Sex	Age
"Rits/T's", Cocaine	Private-Card games	Afr-Amer	F	45

3. May 17, 2002

Primary Drug	Primary Gambling	Ethnicity	Sex	Age
Crack Cocaine	Private-Card games	Afr-Amer	F	38

4. May 22, 2002

Primary Drug	Primary Gambling	Ethnicity	Sex	Age
ETOH	Ohio-Operated	Caucasian	M	49

5. May 22, 2002

Primary Drug	Primary Gambling	Ethnicity	Sex	Age
Heroin	Private-Card games	Caucasian	M	46

6. May 22, 2002

Primary Drug	Primary Gambling	Ethnicity	Sex	Age
Heroin, Crack, MJ	Ohio-operated	Af-Amer	M	51

## 3. Focus Group Information

A short list of questions was posed to each of the focus groups involved in this round of interviews:

Q1. To what extent do you believe your clients have a problem involving gambling of any kind?

Most of the treatment provider groups did not know if their clients had such problems. Yet the CEO of a large Canton residential treatment center said that he was aware of studies that indicated that about 30% of those addicted to alcohol and drugs are also compulsive gamblers. Treatment providers from a facility that counsels both adolescent and adult clients said that their younger clients are also involved in, at least, problem gambling. This appears to be multi-generational, family activity. One member of a focus group of criminal defense attorneys reported that he has handled 3 bankruptcies related to compulsive gambling within the past 6 months. He said that while

there was no clear knowledge of drug involvement, his feeling was that there was possibly some type of substance abuse involved.

Gambling is generally prohibited in treatment programs. However, several residential supervisors who are recovering addicts said that not only were they aware of compulsive gambling among their clients, but that they themselves believe they engage in problem gambling. A high-level administrator from Canton echoed a similar concern:

*Gambling is considered to be that way too (innocuous) and I have seen lots of people in recovery who quit using substances and then turned to gambling at all various levels. And that seems to be okay, among the recovering community. Some of the recovering clubs sanction gambling in their agency as fundraising; you know, legitimate means of fundraising. But observation at twelve step meetings, people seem to condone and there are before meeting bets and after meeting pay-offs and it just seems to be one of those accepted addiction things.*

Q2. How do clients perceive the relationship between their gambling and substance abuse?

Respondents across the board said that they believed that the vast majority of their clients see absolutely no connection whatsoever between the two activities. One counselor said that even among chronic relapsers who admit to gambling problems, there is a belief that gambling could not have had anything to do with past or future relapses. Only one of the professional respondents noted that clients have told her that if it came down to gambling or drugs, that he would opt for drugs. Several treatment providers acknowledged that because the subject of gambling is rarely brought up in counseling, they are probably missing connections between the two behaviors.

Q3. What kinds of gambling are most commonly involved?

A variety of gambling activities was mentioned by treatment providers, including Ohio and out-of-state lottery games, sports betting, casinos, instant lottery games, and card games. A treatment counselor said that she believes bingo is a problem for some of her clients who wager a lot of money on a frequent basis. One recurring theme was the notion that the term gambling is defined differently by different groups of people. For example:

*There is even a misperception – I liken it to beer and alcohol being different things – my grandson’s other parent said to him- this is a ten-year old kid and he was talking about betting on a football game. And I said to him “what are you talking about, you are ten years old and you are talking about betting on a football game.” And he said “oh, my dad said its just- not Vegas gambling- its just football” ... Who would say that to a ten-year old kid. So I think there is a whole perception problem there of what constitutes gambling. Or I guess it is rationalizing or justifying.*

Q4. To what extent do you believe that your clients have a problem involving gambling using the State lottery system, including scratch-offs?

Some respondents said that they believed that almost all of their clients buy lottery tickets, at least occasionally. Those whose clientele included younger addicts felt that those individuals engage in other forms of gambling, because they can not legally purchase the tickets in stores. Among adult clients, purchasing such tickets is not looked upon with any particular concern.

Q5. Do you assess for gambling problems, compulsive gambling or “addictive gambling”?

This question elicited an almost universal response of “No.” One Akron-area treatment provider said her facility asks one closed, yes-or-no question about gambling, on its intake assessment. Stark County participants said that none of their facilities use assessment tools that adequately inquire about possible gambling problems.

Q6. Does your agency have staff qualified and/or certified to address gambling problems among your clients?

There was a divergence of opinion on this question among the treatment providers. Some felt that trained chemical dependency and professional clinical counselors have had adequate training to address any form of addiction. Others felt that special training and experience would be necessary to provide a high level of service delivery to addicts/gamblers. The following response was given by the director of a large Stark County facility:

*One of my goals, and this probably should have been a year ago, but I want to start with our residential clients – we have the longest and most access to and the chance to get the best information. We are going to start the assessment process – one of the problems with doing assessment, if you don’t have a treatment option connected with it, you kind of wonder why you are even asking the questions. But we are training some of our folks involved with the alcohol counseling on compulsive gambling... I think that a year or two from now, the idea of having some kind of license in the various states is going to grow. Because it’s not just in Ohio that they have become aware that it’s a huge, huge problem.*

In general, however, respondents felt that neither they themselves, nor any of their colleagues were qualified to perform meaningful assessments. This question, though, did cause many of the participants to say that they would be interested in developing assessment questions for their respective agencies.

Q7. Do you believe your locale/region has adequate clinical resources to address the needs of the gambling problem in your area?

Participants felt that because gambling remains a largely unidentified problem, it is difficult to ascertain exactly the level of clinical resources that might be needed. Some

voiced the opinion that, like smoking, gambling is seen as a secondary problem to drug addiction. However, some of the respondents with more experience in the area of compulsive gambling said that the behaviors, particularly the individual psychological responses involved, have most of the characteristics and problems associated with other forms of addiction.

Q8. What clinical evidence do you have that compulsive gambling negatively impacts the substance abuse recovery process for your clients?

Those respondents who are aware of having had clients who were compulsive gamblers and drug addicts said that the brain chemistry that triggers craving in addicts is also apparently experienced by compulsive gamblers.

*I have seen it happen with clients or patients that are working in the psych hospital, the sort of physical high that gambling addicts experience and the kind of relapse or the triggers that they have for relapse is similar to some of the drug addiction, especially the cocaine addiction. That when they are around other drugs, or when drug addicts are around gambling, the triggers for relapse for both kinds of addictions are really there. So some of the brain chemistry research has shown that some of the brain chemistry changes in gambling addicts is exactly the same as cocaine addicts. Dependency- denial is such a big thing with CD clients, it is... but with gambling clients... it is such an acceptable form of behavior in our society. Unless you happen to be a Baptist or a Methodist or something, it is perfectly okay to spend \$100 a month on gambling.*

**4. Individual Interviews: Compulsive Gambler/Addicts**

**Demographic Information**

<b>Participant</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Age</b>	55	45	38	49	46	51
<b>Gender</b>	M	F	F	M	M	M
<b>Ethnicity</b>	Caucasian	Af-Amer	Af-Amer	Caucasian	Caucasian	Af-Amer
<b>Education</b>	Master's	12 yrs	12 yrs	Some College	GED	Some college
<b>Employed</b>	Full	Full	Part	Full	No/SSDI	No
<b>Marital</b>	Married	Single	Married	Separated	Separated	Single
<b>Primary Drug(s)</b>	Alcohol	Rits/T's Cocaine	Crack Cocaine	Alcohol Opiates	Heroin	Heroin Cocaine
<b>Length of Use (yrs)</b>	37	17	2	25	34	30+
<b>Use Status</b>	Recovery	Recovery	Recovery	Treatment	Treatment	Treatment

## Gambling Practices

Participant	1	2	3	4	5	6
<b>Type &amp; Individual Ranking</b>						
Ohio Operated	2	2	3	1	2	1
Community Operated	--	--	--	2	4	--
Private	4	1	1	3	1	3
Organized Illegal	--	--	--	4	3	2
Internet	--	--	4	--	--	4
Out of State Casino	1		2	--	--	--
Out of State Lottery	5	--	--	--	--	--
Other	3*	--	--	5	--	--

Participant	1	2	3	4	5	6
<b>Money bet /last year</b>						
Ohio Operated	\$200	0	\$2000	<b>\$1200</b>	\$1000	<b>\$500</b>
Community Operated	--	--	--	\$500	?	--
Private	\$300	<b>\$15,000</b>	<b>\$13,000</b>	\$100	<b>\$5000</b>	\$30
Organized Illegal	--	--	--	\$100	\$1000	\$150
Internet	--	--	\$5000	--	--	?
Out of State Casino	<b>\$3600</b>	--	\$6000	--	--	--
Out of State Lottery	\$20	--	--	--	--	--
Other	\$30,000*	--	--	?	--	--

## Active/Recovering Users with Gambling Problems

### Discussion

#### 1. Use of Drugs Over Time

Respondents described various connections between their use of alcohol and drugs in the past and their gambling behaviors. Some said that their using created disinhibitions and a lack of judgment in the frequency of gambling and the amount spent. Others said that they avoided any activities which might affect their money earmarked for drugs. In other words, drugs were always more important than gambling. As their drug addictions worsened, several respondents said that they curtailed their gambling activities. In several cases, respondents said that their real gambling activities did not begin until they stopped using. In summary, the respondents uniformly saw their drug use progression as their biggest problem, eclipsing any others, including gambling.

*CG: I started off smoking marijuana and drinking a beer every now and then but then I ended up doing it all, you know, whatever could get me high I would do it . . . – smoking marijuana smoking crack, shooting ritz and Ts [an injectable combination of methylphenidate (Ritalin) and pentazocine lactate (Talwin)] and it progressed as the years went on – very bad*

## 2. Gambling and the Family

This group of respondents did not describe the family opposition to gambling that was expected to be described. However, those who said that it was a problem for their spouses were quite emphatic about it. Family members told some of the respondents “go to Gamblers Anonymous!” In other cases, the gambling itself was not described as problematic for spouses, but rather the time spent away from the family was the greater issue. One respondent said that he believes that his wife shares his gambling problem. Another said that he started gambling at 15, because gambling was a “family sport.” None of the respondents said that they ever felt that their families were in physical danger, but that they were in financial danger on some occasions as a result of the participant’s gambling activities.

*M: [My wife would] be upset and I’d sleep on the couch, things like that, because I’d spend the money on gambling, betting instead of paying the bills.*

*CG: Yeah, my significant other gets pissed when I go 3 or 4 nights a week, yeah. He says I love the cards more than I love him. So that kind of split us up for a while.*

## 3. Gambling As a Personal Problem

Participants said that they frequently experienced mental, as well as physical discomfort as a result of their gambling behavior. Remorse for having spent or lost more than they intended, elicited the following responses:

*JC: I will keep losing, and go to the ATM and get more money and finally hit a point where you have done that and won it all back and then some- but usually you lose!*

*AR: I have a plan, now I’m a little better at it. Like I only take the money that I’m saying I going to deal with, before I use to take every dime.*

*Wags: Yes, there were times when I’d buy scratch-off tickets to the point of trying to get that big win and I’d spend everything that was in my pocket. And sometimes I’d just cash a check. That made me feel very depressed.*

Sleeplessness, anxiety, and stomach problems were reported by some participants, while others seemed to be able to deal with losses without much physical discomfort. Four out of the six respondents said that they had gambled to pay debts, utility bills, etc.

*M: Yes, just betting footballs games hoping I’d come out ahead, as far as to pay my gas bill, car payments.*

*AR: Thinking that, ok I was short of money, like for a bill or something, think that if I went and gambled, took this money, maybe I’ll win enough to pay this bill or cover this bill or a debt that I owned. Sometimes it worked out, but sometimes it didn’t.*

Respondents' perceptions of their gambling as problem behavior was variable within this group. Some felt that it is not a major problem, and even those who felt that they could benefit from help have never sought it. None of the participants had ever attended Gamblers Anonymous.

#### 4. Alcohol/Drugs and Gambling

The responses of participants concerning their beliefs about connections between their drug use and gambling were somewhat diverse. One 55-year old man in recovery for 11 years said that he doesn't think that his gambling was affected by alcohol, but sees it more as a "replacement addiction." A 38-year old female respondent with 10 years of sobriety said:

*The rush, the rush you get from gambling is like the same rush you get from doing drugs. To the point were you can't, I mean you can't stop. Like doing drugs like doing drugs, just a little bit more, just a little bit more. And gambling, ok just this next time. You think your going to hit it the next time.*

Another respondent, a 49-year old male said that he saw a strong connection between his substance use and gambling:

*Repondent: Definitely, when I'm in the mist of my addiction of drugs and alcohol I seem to be, a lot less responsible towards my money. I gambled freely. But when I'm in the AA rooms and feeling better about myself I very rarely bet. I don't get carried away on it.*

*Int: Did you gamble to buy alcohol or drugs?*

*Respondent: Oh yea, if I would hit big, it would be a trigger to drink or use. Party time!*

All respondents said that when they won while gambling, their use of alcohol and drugs increased. However, only one of them said that he thought that losing money was a direct cause of increased drinking and drugging. Other respondents said that their drug and alcohol addictions "had a life of their own" regardless of other circumstances in their lives. The sentiment among them was "I used when I was happy, I used when I was sad...."

#### 5. Help for Gambling in Treatment

Among this group of respondents, the universal response was negative when they were asked if they had been asked questions about gambling problems during their intake process. Three of the participants were currently in drug and alcohol treatment, and three were in recovery, all for over 10 years. Those in treatment were asked to respond to the survey criteria questionnaire, and they said that was the first time gambling had been mentioned during their treatment. Obviously then, no services for gambling problems had been offered to any of the clients. All of the respondents said that they had never been asked about gambling, nor offered any help for gambling problems in any detox or treatment program in which they had participated.

**Alcohol/Drug Abuse and Compulsive Gambling**  
**(Cuyahoga County, Cleveland, Ohio)**

An OSAM Rapid Response Report Prepared for the Ohio Department of Alcohol  
and Drug Addiction Services

January 2002 – June 2002

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## Abstract

The findings in this rapid response report were collected through interviews with substance using gamblers, treatment providers, and law enforcement personnel in Cuyahoga County. Gamblers were asked about the types of gambling in which they participated as well as the amount of money spent gambling and the impact of gambling on their relationships and drug use. Treatment providers were asked about their perceptions of the relationship between gambling and drug use and their experiences treating clients with gambling problems.

### ALCOHOL/DRUG ABUSERS AND GAMBLING

Five individuals were interviewed concerning the link between compulsive gambling and alcohol and other drug use. All five individuals were males; three were Hispanic, one was white, and one was African-American. Ages ranged from 24 to 32 years. All of the participants were currently in recovery for substance abuse. Three were former marijuana abusers, one was a former powdered cocaine abuser, and one was a former alcohol abuser. Two of the men were divorced and the other three had never been married. Two of the respondents worked full time, two were unemployed and one was receiving disability.

**Table 1**

Age	Ethnicity	Gender	Marital Status	Education	Employment	Drug Use Background
24	Hispanic	Male	Single	Less than high school	Unemployed	Marijuana
29	Hispanic	Male	Divorced	High school	Disability	Powder cocaine/ Alcohol
24	Hispanic	Male	Single	Less than high school	Full time	Marijuana
32	White	Male	Divorced	College degree	Full time	Alcohol
26	Af. Amer.	Male	Single	Less than high school	Unemployed	Marijuana

*Recruitment Procedures: Treatment providers at two Cleveland drug treatment agencies were asked to recruit clients who gambled as well as abused drugs.*

As Table 2 indicates, the respondents were involved with various types of gambling including Ohio operated, Community operated, private games, and organized illegal. In the last year participants spent anywhere from \$2,000 to \$22,000 on gambling activities. Four of the five respondents were under 18 years of age when they first started gambling on a regular basis.

**Table 2**

Age at Start of Gambling	Money Spent in Past Year	Type of Gambling
14	\$1400 \$300	Ohio Operated Scratch-offs Lottery
25	\$1000 \$500 \$500	Ohio Operated Community Private
12	\$2000	Private
17	\$7000-10,000 \$1000 \$1000 \$200	Out of State Casino (Las Vegas, Detroit) Internet Private Ohio Operated
17	\$20,000 \$2,000	Private Ohio Operated

**Table 3**

Complaints about gambling?	Felt badly about gambling?	Spent more money than intended?	Feel they have a problem?
Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

All of the participants had received complaints about their gambling, felt badly about gambling and spent more money than intended on gambling. Spouses, significant others, and parents were most likely to complain about participants' gambling behavior. However, none of the respondents had ever felt that his family was in danger. Three of the five respondents felt that they currently have a gambling problem. One of the respondents had participated in a treatment program out of state that addressed gambling issues; however, none of the others had actively gone to treatment for a gambling problem. One respondent stated that he felt badly about the money but he also felt badly about the amount of time he spent gambling.

*... You know, maybe we would go on vacation and I would spend more time at the black jack table then. The time, more than the money...there*

*would be times I would go up there (Detroit) and go to the casino or whatever and not see my kids, and they are right there.*

The participants felt that their gambling behavior escalated when they were using drugs or alcohol. They would gamble more often as well as spend more money than they planned. Two of the men indicated that they would gamble to increase the amount of money they would have to buy drugs.

*...like if I had two dollars I would sit there and think I can take these two dollars and buy two instants and then one of them hit for \$10 then I could go get marijuana. Or I could take these two dollars and get two instants and they could hit for \$20 and then I could get some pills. I was programmed, getting instants and getting money.*

Several of the participants discussed the “rush” they felt in gambling as similar to the feeling of getting high. Gambling as a means of solving financial problems was discussed by three of the participants. Three of the five men discussed having physical “problems” such as feeling anxious and/or depressed related to their gambling behavior (see Table 4).

**Table 4**

<b>Tried to get help?</b>	<b>Participated in treatment?</b>	<b>Gamble more when using?</b>	<b>Gamble to buy alcohol/drugs?</b>	<b>Gamble to solve money problems?</b>	<b>Health problems?</b>
No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No

As Table 5 shows two of the men interviewed felt that they were currently in need of treatment for gambling. Three of the men had been asked about their gambling behaviors by professional staff at the treatment center and two had been referred to Gambler’s Anonymous for support.

**Table 5**

<b>Need help now?</b>	<b>Staff asked about gambling?</b>	<b>Offered services?</b>
No	Yes	Yes Gambler's Anonymous
Yes	No	No
No	No	No
No	Yes	No
Yes	Yes	Yes Gambler's Anonymous

## **TREATMENT PROVIDERS**

Individuals from two agencies, one from a Hispanic agency and one from an agency associated with the probation department, participated in focus group discussions. There were a total of ten case managers involved, 8 women and 2 men.

Treatment providers generally felt that gambling was not an issue for their clients, however they do not screen their clients for gambling problems. There was a sense that gambling may emerge as a point of discussion during group sessions and may be addressed at that point. That is, during the recovery process clients become aware of other compulsive or addictive behaviors besides alcohol and other drug use in their lives. Providers did state that many of their clients purchase instant scratch-off tickets and lottery tickets. Some also saw "street gambling" (shooting dice, cards) as an issue for some of their clients.

Providers did see how the atmosphere and people associated with gambling could be a trigger for clients in recovery. As one provider put it...

*...it's not the gambling itself...I think it's where it is happening, the atmosphere, the kind of people they are surrounded by, that kind of thing is what influences them. Therefore, when you go gambling, you know, it becomes a trigger for them to do whatever. But gambling then becomes the trigger, because when they gamble, all those things happen. Drinking, drug abuse. Also, if you are the person making money every time you gamble, you have money to buy.*

As previously mentioned there is not a protocol in either treatment agency where focus groups were conducted for assessing gambling as a treatment issue. Neither of the agencies had staff that was qualified or certified in any way to address gambling problems and the focus group participants felt there were not adequate resources to do so.

One provider felt that he had seen several cases that supported the negative link between gambling and substance abuse recovery.

*...we had a client who was playing cards. And I say, "Well, what happens when you play cards?" And I say, "Well they can't play cards anymore. And that was more of a bigger challenge for him actually than anything else that has to do with his recovery itself."*

Generally the providers and agencies did not state strong clinical evidence that compulsive gambling impacts the substance abuse recovery process. However, there was a consensus that it may be a co-occurring problem for their clients.

**Alcohol/Drug Abuse and Compulsive Gambling  
(Columbus and Franklin County, Ohio)**

An OSAM Rapid Response Report Prepared for the Ohio Department of Alcohol  
and Drug Addiction Services

January 2002 – June 2002

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## ABSTRACT

A diverse sample of clients was interviewed at two inpatient facilities. All respondents had engaged in Ohio-operated gambling. Ohio-operated and private gambling were the preferred types of gambling. Estimates on money spent in the past year on gambling ranged from \$100 to \$9300. All but one respondent reported having spent more money on gambling than they had intended, however most felt that they did not have a problem. The correlation between substance use and gambling was high. Most had been asked about gambling in treatment, but had not been offered any services.

May 31, 2002: Alcoholic in recovery

Age	Ethnicity	Gender	Experience/Background
53	Black	Male	Alcohol abuser for 30 years and gambling addiction

Recruitment Procedure: *Colleague of Key Informant recruited and interviewed participant.*

May 31, 2002: User in treatment

Age	Ethnicity	Gender	Experience/Background
21	White	Male	Cocaine user for 6 years; family involved with the mob

Recruitment Procedure: *Colleague of Key Informant recruited and interviewed participant.*

May 31, 2002: User in treatment

Age	Ethnicity	Gender	Experience/Background
44	Black	Female	Smoked cocaine for 20 years, gambler

Recruitment Procedure: *Colleague of Key Informant recruited and interviewed participant.*

May 31, 2002: User in treatment

Age	Ethnicity	Gender	Experience/Background
24	White	Male	Used marijuana for 6 years and injected heroin for 2 years, active gambler

Recruitment Procedure: *Colleague of Key Informant recruited and interviewed participant.*

May 31, 2002: User in recovery

Age	Ethnicity	Gender	Experience/Background
45	Black	Female	Crack/cocaine user for 15 years, gambler

Recruitment Procedure: *Colleague of Key Informant recruited and interviewed participant.*

May 31, 2002: User in treatment

Age	Ethnicity	Gender	Experience/Background
27	White	Male	Snorts cocaine, gambler

Recruitment Procedure: *Colleague of Key Informant recruited and interviewed participant.*

May 31, 2002: User in recovery

Age	Ethnicity	Gender	Experience/Background
62	Black	Male	Used cocaine for 4 years, alcohol for many years, gambler

Recruitment Procedure: *Colleague of Key Informant recruited and interviewed participant.*

June 1, 2002: User in treatment

Age	Ethnicity	Gender	Experience/Background
25	White	Male	Uses many different drugs, gambler

Recruitment Procedure: *Colleague of Key Informant recruited and interviewed participant.*

June 1, 2002: User in treatment

Age	Ethnicity	Gender	Experience/Background
38	Black	Female	Uses many different drugs, alcohol for 20 years and crack for 8 years, gambler

Recruitment Procedure: *Colleague of Key Informant recruited and interviewed participant.*

June 1, 2002: User in treatment

Age	Ethnicity	Gender	Experience/Background
44	White	Male	Drank alcohol for 26 years, gambler

Recruitment Procedure: *Colleague of Key Informant recruited and interviewed participant.*

June 1, 2002: User in treatment

Age	Ethnicity	Gender	Experience/Background
31	Black	Male	Drugs of choice are marijuana and cocaine, heavy gambler

Recruitment Procedure: *Colleague of key Informant recruited and interviewed participant.*

June 1, 2002: User in treatment

Age	Ethnicity	Gender	Experience/Background
51	White	Male	Drank alcohol for 19 years, currently in detox, gambler

Recruitment Procedure: *Colleague of Key Informant recruited and interviewed participant.*

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

A diverse sample was interviewed at two inpatient treatment centers. Those participants in recovery from substance addiction (N=3) were employed as counselors in these facilities. Ages of participants ranged from 21 to 62. Six of the twelve participants were Black and three were female. Due to recruiting difficulties, a proxy for the Key Informant gathered the information, but was unable to record the interviews due to treatment center restrictions. However, the written protocol was completed for each participant.

Participant education level was high. No one had less than a high school education and many reported attending some college. Over half were employed, at least part-time. Primary drugs of choice were cocaine and alcohol.

All participants had engaged in Ohio operated gambling, 3 in community-operated; 9 in private; 3 in organized/illegal; none on the Internet; 6 in out-of-state casino; and none in out-of-state lottery. One participant reported gambling at AA meetings. Ohio-operated and private were the preferred types of gambling. Estimates of money spent on gambling ranged from \$100 per year to \$9300 per year. Nine respondents started gambling in their teens. All but one reported having spent more money than intended. This particular person spent approximately \$4000 over the past year, primarily on Ohio-operated. Five felt they had a gambling related problem and one had participated in treatment and self-help for gambling.

Personal losses were substantial and included damaged relationships, legal troubles, and physical manifestations of stress. However, most respondents did not report related problems. Not surprisingly, correlations between gambling and using substances, and gambling to buy alcohol and drugs were high. Most of

those currently in treatment had been asked about gambling by a professional staff member but had not been offered any services while in treatment.

Treatment providers interviewed seldom directly addressed gambling, but issues sometimes emerged as the therapeutic relationship progressed. Typically, providers reported that users didn't consider their gambling behaviors addictive. One provider described a recent interaction:

*"I just had a client. And he was a chronic crack, alcohol, marijuana, everything  
He just did not see that his gambling was an addiction. He checked his  
numbers everyday. Mostly scratch-offs. Go to the gas station on breaks during  
treatment. Don't have a lot to look forward to."*

Clearly, compulsive gambling is an issue that is not adequately dealt with in treatment and needs to be addressed as a co-addiction in many cases.

**Alcohol/Drug Abuse and Compulsive Gambling**  
**(Dayton, Ohio)**

An OSAM Rapid Response Report Prepared for the Ohio Department of Alcohol  
and Drug Addiction Services

January 2002 – June 2002

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## **I. Introduction**

The Ohio Department of Alcohol and Drug Addiction Services (ODADAS) and the Ohio Lottery Commission (OLC) are collaborating in an effort to better understand the relationship between substance abuse and compulsive gambling. The Ohio Lottery Commission is funding the development of a pilot program to each of four Ohio counties to provide treatment services for these co-occurring addictions. The Ohio Department of Alcohol and Drug Addiction Services has been asked to conduct a needs assessment to provide direction to ODADAS and the OLC for future funding and/or expansion of treatment services as well as to determine areas to begin addressing prevention needs.

This report is part of an OSAM Network Rapid Response Initiative for ODADAS. The report details information obtained from active or recovering substance abusers who also had an extensive history of gambling. In addition to the information presented by active or recovering users, substance abuse treatment professionals were interviewed to better understand compulsive gambling among their clients.

## **II. Methods**

Ten individual interviews were conducted with active or recovering substance abusers between April 2, 2002 and April 11, 2002. The purpose of the interviews was to understand their substance abuse and gambling histories, and any relationships between their substance abuse and compulsive gambling behaviors. Using convenience sampling techniques, participants were recruited by Outreach Workers working for Wright State University's Health Research Project.

After obtaining Informed Consent from each participant, interviewers followed a protocol developed to gather information about substance abuse and gambling behavior. The areas covered by the protocol included, demographic information, substance abuse history, gambling history, gambling activities and expenditures in the past year, personal and physical problems as a result of gambling, perceived need for help for gambling, experience with treatment for a gambling problem, and the relationship between substance abuse and gambling.

Each interview and focus group was audio-taped with participants' permission. Tapes were transcribed, verified, and then coded using Folio Views, a qualitative data analysis software package. Major themes were identified. Notes and relevant quotes were documented. Approval to conduct this study was obtained through Wright State University's Institutional Review Board.

Although the bulk of the information contained in this report is from the ten individual interviews with active or recovering substance abusers, some

information was obtained from a focus group with treatment providers. At the conclusion of our Drug Trends focus group, treatment providers were asked to speak briefly about substance abuse and compulsive gambling as they saw it among the clients they served. Specifically, treatment providers were asked whether or not their agency formally assessed clients for gambling problems, if their agency could treat gambling addiction, and their perception of the extent of gambling problems among their substance abuse clients.

### III. Demographics

As seen in Table 1, active users ranged in age from 32 to 61 years of age. Two participants were female, seven were African American and four had never been married. Education levels of participants ranged from ninth grade to four years of post-high school education. All participants were unemployed—some reported working odd jobs on occasion.

**Table 1. Participant Demographics**

Participant	Age	Gender	Education	Employment	Marital	Ethnicity
1	32	Female	10	Unemployed	Single	African American
2	39	Female	12	Unemployed	Single	African American
3	58	Male	12	Unemployed	Divorced	African American
4	50	Male	12	Unemployed	Divorced	African American
5	48	Male	16	Unemployed	Single	African American
6	39	Male	12	Unemployed	Single	Caucasian
7	51	Male	14	Unemployed	Divorced	Caucasian
8	61	Male	9	Unemployed	Widowed	African American
9	49	Male	14	Unemployed	Married	African American
10	47	Male	9	Unemployed	Divorced	Caucasian

### IV. Drug Use History

The drug histories of the ten participants varied greatly, but most began by abusing alcohol at an early age. All participants reported the abuse of alcohol, nine had abused or were currently abusing marijuana, and nine abused either crack cocaine or powdered cocaine currently or in the past. Five participants we interviewed reported crack cocaine as their drug of choice. Four participants reported alcohol as their primary drug, and one participant was a heroin injector. One participant described himself as in recovery, but not in treatment; all other participants were actively using alcohol and or other drugs.

## V. Gambling History

Gambling histories of participants varied greatly, but most began gambling on a regular basis early in their lives. The age at which gambling on a regular basis began ranged from 9 to 20 years of age (average age 14.7 years). Early gambling typically included card games or playing craps, and most participants grew up in a family where gambling was a part of life—learning from parents and siblings. Interestingly, one participant described house parties, called “smokers,” that his family hosted in order to make money. As he described, he helped his family with these house parties from the age of nine:

*Uh, when I grew up we were very, very poor and only means of actually making the extra money or actually paying the bills we would throw house parties that, uh, that were called smokers. So my mom would cook chicken, uh, have different little dishes like chili or something you know and we'd sell the chicken or the chili, we used the beds to, uh, shoot craps on, and we'd have two or three tables set up one for black jack and one for poker, just like a casino and then we would cut the pots so I was allowed to start cutting the pots when I was about nine.*

## VI. Gambling Practices (past year)

Participants were asked to list the types of gambling they had participated in over the past year. We also asked participants to estimate the amount of money they had spent on each type of gambling over the past year. Seven participants identified the Ohio Lottery as their primary form of gambling. Of those seven, three played the instant lottery (scratch-offs), three participated primarily in the numbers drawings (“Pick 3” or “Pick 4”), and one reported participating equally in both the instant lottery and numbers drawings. The remaining three participants reported gambling on billiards or card games, or playing craps as their primary form of gambling.

As seen in Table 2, participants who played the Ohio Lottery estimated spending between \$80 and \$1200 a month on instant tickets and/or numbers drawings—all ten participants reported participating in the Ohio Lottery. Eight individuals estimated gambling between \$84 and \$1200 a month in private gambling such as card games and craps. The two participants who gambled on horse racing estimated spending between \$400 and \$600 per month, and the four participants who participated in illegal gambling spent between \$4 and \$400 a month.

**Table 2. Summary of Gambling Behavior over the Past Year**

Type of gambling	Spending range (per month)	Average (per month)	Participants reporting this type of gambling in past year*
Ohio Lottery (instant or numbers)	\$80-\$1200	\$105	10
Horse Racing	\$400-\$600	\$500	2
Community Operated (e.g., Bingo)	\$8	\$8	3
Private (e.g., card games, craps)	\$84-\$1200	\$486	8
Organized Illegal (e.g., numbers, bookie, sports)	\$4-\$400	\$131	4
Internet			1**
Out of state casino	\$200	\$200	2
Out of state lottery	\$1	\$1	2

Note: Participants estimated their monthly expenditures for gambling in the past year. Participants may not have gambled every month or may have gambled more or less from month to month.

\* Participants may have indicated a type of gambling played in the past year, but were unwilling to provide an estimate of monthly expenditures.

\*\* One participant reported using the Internet to gamble (legally) on horse races.

Interestingly, one participant reported using the Internet to gamble. According to this participant, horse tracks with an online presence allow you to open an account with them which then allows you to place bets on the actual (physical) horse races. Winnings are immediately placed into your online account, which can be used to place future bets.

Given our limited sample of primarily lower socioeconomic participants, the use of the Internet as a medium for gambling is likely underrepresented in this report—most of the participants we interviewed did not own home computers or did not know how to access the Internet.

## **VII. Gambling and Drug Use**

The following are case studies portraying the extensive substance abuse and gambling histories of the participants we interviewed. Case Study 1 illustrates the early beginning of gambling and how it grew into a lifestyle. Case Study 2 illustrates the large amounts of money spent on weekly gambling by some of our participants.

### **Case Study #1**

“B” is a 58-year-old black male with a high school education. He is unemployed and divorced. He first began using alcohol on a regular basis at age 30 and began using marijuana at age 38. “B” began using crack cocaine at age 48 by lacing his marijuana cigarettes with it (“primos”). “B” now considers his drug of

choice to be crack cocaine. “B” began gambling on a regular basis at the age of 12 and as a young adult he wrote numbers for a bookie, keeping a \$500 a day book. During this successful time in “B’s” life, he was earning over \$1000 a week and betting large amounts of money in craps games. “B” no longer writes numbers and now primarily plays the Ohio Lottery numbers drawings—betting \$60 a week.

## **Case Study #2**

“Fred” is a 39-year-old single, white male with a high school education. He considers alcohol his drug of choice, but also abuses marijuana, powdered cocaine, Vicodin and crack cocaine. He began using alcohol and marijuana regularly at age 19. He began using powdered cocaine at age 24 and crack at age 29. “Fred” plays the Ohio Lottery numbers drawings daily and also gambles (hustles) on billiards. He considers himself a very good billiards player and reported that he travels to Las Vegas every year where he plays in the international billiards tournament. “Fred” currently gambles between \$100 and \$200 a week on the Ohio Lottery, billiards, and horse racing.

All participants reported that their use of alcohol and/or other drugs always accompanied their gambling activities. However, when finances are limited, money is used to purchase drugs instead of being used for gambling. As such, obtaining and using drugs was perceived as taking priority over their gambling activities. As one participant stated:

*M: If I had 50 dollars, I would have enough to buy me a 30 cent piece [of crack] and 20 dollars worth of tickets. And my drink [alcohol] you know and that ain't nothing but a dollar. If I had 20 dollars, I'm gonna buy me a piece of crack and the drink. If I had 30 dollars, I buy me 10 dollars worth of tickets and a 20 [dollar piece of crack] you know...*

*Interviewer: So as long as you, you have the crack then you might get [lottery] tickets if you have money left over?*

*M: Yeah.*

*Interviewer: Right. But if you don't have money left over after you buy the crack, then you won't gamble that time or whatever?*

*M: Exactly.*

*Interviewer: What if you weren't drinking or using crack and you had money, would you buy tickets?*

*M: I wouldn't.*

*Interviewer: Not until you bought crack and alcohol?*

*M: I never go and gamble... I don't do one without the other one, but crack is the main one and then everything else follow behind it.*

Three themes emerged when participants were asked to describe the relationship between their gambling behavior and substance abuse. Some participants reported that their gambling was an attempt to win money so that they could purchase more drugs. In fact, as one participant described, he sometimes gambled rocks of crack cocaine in an attempt to win more crack cocaine.

*Interviewer:* Okay, so then the next question is you gambled to buy alcohol or drugs?

*DD:* Yeah, gambled with the drugs or to buy 'em.

*Interviewer:* With the drugs, yeah. So you'd have a couple, you'd have a couple rocks and you...

*DD:* Yeah, gambled the rocks and see if you can get more.

Another participant summarized this theme of gambling for drugs. She gambles to win more money for drugs; however, she will only do so if she has drugs to use first.

*M:* My whole purpose out of the thirty dollars I had and I bought a \$20 piece [of crack cocaine] that \$10 dollars, that's left going on tickets to see if I can win more money to get some more crack. That's my way of thinking.

A second theme that emerged was that several participants used substances while they gambled because they believed that the calming or relaxing effects of the drugs they used (e.g., marijuana, alcohol) increased their chances of winning. The calming or relaxing effect described by some participants decreased their tendency to worry about losing. According to these participants, if you are worried about losing money, then you inhibit your gambling ability. So, by using drugs, the gambler is relaxed and less worried about losing money. This in turn is believed to increase the ability of the gambler, thereby resulting in greater odds of winning. As a 58-year-old black man said,

*Interviewer:* ...you might have had something to drink just to kinda loosen yourself up so that you wouldn't be so worried about gambling?

*B:* Exactly. exactly.

*Interviewer:* Cause you felt by doing that you would do better?

*B:* I wouldn't have no conscience on the money, uh, if you gotta kind, if you're worried about losing it...

*Interviewer:* You're not gonna play good?

*B:* You just as well not even play because if you, most, usually you lose, if you think you're gonna lose or you're worried about losing...

*Interviewer:* Uh huh.

*B: That's uh, that's counts against you coming out the gate...*

*Interviewer: Uh huh.*

*B: But if you come out kinda loose and you know uh losing ain't on your mind and I would kinda stimulate my mind by getting a little tipsy... and that was my philosophy on it anyway.*

Another participant explained that he drank alcohol while gambling because he believed he was more likely to gamble more money, and by gambling more money, he increased his chances of winning. As he explained,

*H: Wait a minute, when you gambling you like to have a drink.*

*Interviewer: Uh huh, so they go together?*

*H: Yea.*

*Interviewer: Okay.*

*H: That, that's give you more purpose to gamble.*

*Interviewer: Yea, so it's part of the whole...*

*H: Yea the whole outfit, that whole game...you know, you say man, give me another drink, or may as well put this, put twenty on this, twenty on that, so you started gambling because you're drinking, if you wasn't drinking you wouldn't put that much [money] on it...*

*Interviewer: So you bet more when you're drinking?*

*H: Yea, that's the name of the game.*

The final theme that became evident regarding the relationship between gambling behavior and substance abuse was that some participants gambled solely for the "rush" or excitement of gambling. These participants explained that the rush they got from gambling was similar to the rush they got from using alcohol or other drugs. According to one participant, the rush of gambling voided the rush he got from using drugs.

*B: Well, uh, it was weird because while gambling I may be at the track I may be drinking but I wouldn't get high because the gambling took precedent over the drinking and it just would not allow me; I could be at the track or you know or get in the other card, card game and be drinking like a fish and wouldn't even feel it wouldn't be high or drunk or anything wouldn't feel it.*

*Interviewer: Did you get a rush off of winning?*

*B: Oh of course, yeah*

*Interviewer: Yeah you get like this, yeah.*

*B: Yeah.*

*Interviewer: Um, so you'd be consuming the same amount but you would be not getting that change of feeling?*

*B: Right, right. I mean, you know and I've even had you know cocaine at the track, you know, no affect whatsoever.*

In summary, the use of alcohol and/or other drugs always accompanied the gambling activities of the participants we interviewed. Three distinct themes emerged when participants were asked to describe the relationship between their gambling behavior and drug use. Some gambled in an attempt to win more money to buy more drugs. Others believed drug use facilitated their gambling skill and increased their chances of winning, and some described the rush they got from gambling to be the same as the rush they got from their drug use.

### **VIII. Problems Associated with Gambling**

Many participants reported often spending more money than they originally intended on gambling. In some instances, participants would gamble with money that was set aside to pay for bills or other necessities. One participant explained how he once had gambled away most of his paycheck and could not afford to buy food for a month:

*And I didn't have no money for the month to eat on, and I ate at churches and, it was just sad. I went to a food pantry and got a food box and... You know there's a difference if you win you eat steak and if you lose you eat bologna.*

Another participant described how he gambled away money he had set aside for bills in an attempt to win money to not only pay his bills, but to also purchase drugs:

*I've had money to pay bills with and I promised I'd go pay it, pay the bill and ended up not paying it cause there was a crap game and said well, I can get in this crap game and win enough to pay the bills and have enough to get some dope, too.*

Ironically, one participant told us how he once traveled to Las Vegas and gambled more than he intended. Consequently, he had to borrow money to get back home.

Participants described how their gambling had caused problems with family and friends. Participants reported that many arguments with spouses or other family members often centered on their gambling behavior. Some participants even attributed their broken marriages to their gambling problems. Most participants explained that family and friends did not see their gambling as a problem, but saw losing money in gambling as a problem. One participant described how his gambling affected his relationship with his wife:

*When I got married my wife complained. I was working at for the General Motors and got behind on the bills cause of my gambling. Usually when I had an argument it was about money and usually when it was about money that was only my vice at that time was shooting crap, gambling.*

*Back when I was married huh, and me and my old lady would get to arguing about me gambling, messing up money, that's about the only time uh, what's that they say, uh, you can only talk shit when you're winning, you can't talk shit when you losing.*

Several participants also explained how they often found themselves betting larger and larger amounts of money in an attempt to recoup previous betting losses (chasing their losses). Often this behavior resulted in larger debt and in some cases individuals had to borrow money from family and friends to pay their gambling debts.

The problems participants experienced associated with gambling were varied, but several themes did emerge. Many described hardships with family or friends because of losses resulting from their gambling activities. Most reported spending more money than they intended spending on gambling—often exhausting funds set aside for bills and other necessities, and participants often found themselves further in debt by *chasing their losses*.

## **IX. Perceived Need for Help**

Despite the varied and numerous hardships reported by the individuals we interviewed, only two had ever pursued help with their gambling problem. One had participated in Gamblers Anonymous several years ago and another had been participating in Gamblers Anonymous for five weeks. All participants were familiar with Gamblers Anonymous, but as described below, most did not see their gambling as problematic enough to pursue help.

### Perception of Gambling Behavior

Of the ten individuals we interviewed, only one perceived the need for help with his gambling. The nine other individuals did not feel their gambling was problematic. When asked why they did not perceive their gambling as problematic, these nine individuals stated one of three main reasons.

First, some participants believed that their substance abuse problem was intertwined with their gambling behavior, and if they stopped abusing drugs, they would stop gambling. One participant explained:

*Interviewer: Um, do you feel that you currently need help for a gambling problem?*

*M: I do, but I know I ain't going to get it.*

*Interviewer: Okay. Is there any reason, I mean...*

*M: That I didn't want to go?*

*Interviewer: Is there something you don't like about like gamblers anonymous or something I mean is there a reason like that or just...*

*M: No. No. Cause I know if I stop smoking crack I'll stop gambling so...*

*Interviewer: So it's not the gambling that needs to be treated...*

*M: It's my crack.*

Second, some participants considered the amount of money that they gambled to be small—if they were gambling larger amounts of money, only then would they perceive a need for help. This is what one individual said when asked if he felt he had a gambling problem:

*B: Now if I was handling more money, see then it could get to be a problem, but you can't, you can't lose what you ain't got.*

*Interviewer: Uh huh.*

*B: The more money I had, the bigger problem it was for me.*

*Interviewer: When was it a problem, like two years ago, five years ago?*

*B: No it was back when I was writing numbers and I kept a lot of money on me.*

The final reason participants did not perceive a need for gambling treatment was that although they were gambling, and in some instances gambling fairly large amounts of money, they still had basic necessities such as a house, food and utilities. They believed that if they ever began to lose these items because of their gambling, then they had a gambling problem and they would then pursue help.

### Perceived Availability of Treatment for Compulsive Gambling

Two issues emerged when participants spoke about their need for help with gambling problems. First, no one knew specifically who to contact if they wanted to pursue treatment for a gambling problem. However, every participant believed they could contact CrisisCare (Montgomery County's central intake and substance abuse assessment agency) or any treatment agency to get help with their gambling problem. The reasoning was that they believed the underlying addiction was basically the same for gambling and substance abuse—professionals able to treat drug addiction should also be able to treat gambling addiction. If a substance abuse treatment agency was unable to actually treat the gambling addiction, it was believed that the agency could easily refer the individual to an agency that could help. One participant explained:

*Interviewer: What would you do if you wanted to get help today do you know what you would do?*

*M: I know that you could call the E, um, anonymous, any, uh, what you call it?*

*Interviewer: Gamblers anonymous?*

*M: Any, um, like a drug, for drugs, for alcohol any place like that will let you know about the other one.*

*Interviewer: Okay.*

*M: So I can call any...*

*Interviewer: So you can call like CrisisCare or, uh Nova House or something?*

*M: And they'll help you because it's a, yeah. I believe I never, I mean that's just the way I'm thinking I don't know for sure but it seem like any addiction can help you, any addiction place can help you find what you need and what you got a problem with.*

The second issue was that participants thought the Ohio Lottery's attempts to encourage "responsible gambling" were largely insincere. Although every participant knew of Gamblers Anonymous and the Ohio Lottery's statement to *gamble responsibly*, none knew whether or not information regarding Gamblers Anonymous was printed on their lottery tickets. Looking at lottery tickets from individuals we interviewed, instant lottery tickets have a toll-free telephone number for Gamblers Anonymous on the back, receipts from numbers drawings do not have any such information printed on them.

During one interview, a 32-year-old black woman brought a plastic Wal-Mart® bag full of hundreds of losing instant tickets with her. The following is an excerpt of the conversation that followed when she was asked if the tickets had any information on them about how to get help for gambling problems:

*Interviewer: Okay what about like lottery cards, tickets and stuff do they have any information on them about gambling or anything that you've ever seen?*

*M: On the back of it?*

*Interviewer: I mean I don't, I've never...*

*M: I don't know. I ain't never paid no attention. You can't win no money on the back. Uh, no but you can look at one if you want. I don't see none.*

*Interviewer: I know they have something on the web site but I mean do you have, do you have access to a computer that you could...*

*M: No, I don't. It's [the information] the smallest thing on here.*

Another participant had this to say when asked about the Ohio Lottery's statement to gamble responsibly:

*That's why I said uh, they say play responsibly and then when they did have the one, one day, once a day drawin', they put it to twice a day. Now they know people don't want to miss their number so they gonna start playing twice a day to keep from missing their number, and they have the audacity to say play responsibly!*

## **X. Physical Health and Danger**

Participants reported minor disturbances such as obsessive thoughts (e.g., thinking about losses or winning), anxiety and stress as a result of their gambling behavior. All of these disturbances resulted in trouble sleeping at one time or another for most of the participants. At the same time, none of the individuals we interviewed reported significant problems to their health as a result of their gambling behavior. One individual described his obsessive thinking about gambling:

*VLR: It was one of those things, it, obsession with the gambling*

*Interviewer: Uh huh.*

*VLR: 'Cause ordinarily I would go to sleep thinking about what I'm doing the next day at gambling...*

*Interviewer: Uh huh.*

*VLR: Just like an obsession with the drugs, you go to sleep and wake up with the obsession that you're gonna go get drug.*

*Interviewer: Wow!*

*VLR: But I would go to sleep saying I didn't make enough today, I'm gonna try it again tomorrow, and I'm going up and gambling again, the next day even if I lost I'm, I couldn't stop.*

Nine participants reported they never perceived a threat of physical danger to themselves or their families resulting from their gambling behavior. One individual stated that he never felt as though he was in danger because of his gambling unless he won a lot of money. If he had won a lot of money when gambling, then others were aware of this, and he believed there was a threat of being attacked and his winnings being stolen.

## **XI. Assessment and Services in Substance Abuse Treatment**

### Active or Recovering Users

None of the active or recovering users we interviewed were currently in substance abuse treatment. Of the participants who had been involved in substance abuse treatment in the past, none reported being asked about their

gambling behavior during their involvement in a substance abuse treatment program.

### Substance Abuse Treatment Providers

Only one treatment provider reported that the substance abuse treatment agency she worked for assessed for gambling problems. This agency treated substance abuse problems among juveniles. Treatment providers working with adults reported that the only way they ever learn of a client's gambling problem is through incidental mention in one-on-one or group counseling sessions.

When asked how they would assist a client if they found out the client had a gambling problem, treatment providers reported that although they believed the basics of addiction to be the same, they would likely refer the client to another professional or agency with specialized training in gambling addiction.

## **XII. Summary & Recommendations**

In summary, participants we interviewed described gambling and substance abuse histories that typically began relatively early in their lives. According to the individuals we interviewed, the use of alcohol and/or other drugs always accompanied gambling activities.

All ten people participated in the Ohio Lottery, and seven of these participants considered the Ohio Lottery their primary gambling activity—spending from \$80 to \$1200 per month on instant tickets and/or the numbers drawings. Despite the hardships described by participants as a result of their gambling behavior, only one believed his gambling behavior to be problematic enough to seek help.

Based on our study, the following recommendations can be made:

- More public awareness regarding help with gambling problems is needed. Participants we interviewed did not know who specifically to contact if they wanted to get help with their gambling problems.
- Apparently, local substance abuse programs do not screen for gambling problems. Substance abuse treatment programs should assess for gambling problems as part of their routine substance abuse assessment. Treatment professionals reported that they had known several active users relapse back into substance abuse because of an untreated gambling addiction.
- The Ohio Lottery should make information about Gamblers Anonymous more visible to those who play the lottery. Participants believed that existing information on the back of instant lottery tickets was poorly

located, was written in too small of print, and largely ignored. Besides “Please Play Responsibly,” information is not printed on the front or back of numbers drawings receipts. Finally, information on the Ohio Lottery website was not easily accessible to most of the individuals we interviewed.

It should be noted that information contained in this preliminary report was obtained through convenience sampling of only ten participants. Caution should be exercised in generalizing this information to the general population of active or recovering substance abusers with compulsive gambling problems.

**Alcohol/Drug Abuse and Compulsive Gambling  
(Portage, Lake, and Trumbull Counties)**

An OSAM Rapid Response Report Prepared for the Ohio Department of Alcohol  
and Drug Addiction Services

January 2002 – June 2002

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## **Abstract**

*The information provided by the participants in this report was gathered by individually interviewing gamblers in Mentor (Lake County), Warren (Trumbull County), and Ravenna (Portage County) who also have a drug/alcohol problem. Participants were asked about their gambling habits and the links between alcohol and drug usage. Substance abuse treatment providers were also interviewed about what services their organizations offer, if any, to substance users who might also have a gambling problem. A total of 16 alcohol/drug users were interviewed. Of the 16 interviewed, 12 qualified (six females and six males) for the rapid response interview about compulsive gambling. Their information is detailed below. Substance abuse treatment providers were also interviewed about what services their organizations offer, if any, to substance users who might also have a gambling problem.*

### **ALCOHOL/DRUG ABUSERS AND GAMBLING**

There were a total of six female participants and six male participants. The types of gambling participated in differed based upon gender. The females were more likely to gamble on the Ohio Operated Lottery and Scratch-offs while the males were more likely to gamble on Sports and Racing Events (see Tables 1A, 1B, 1C, and 1D).

The amount of money spent on gambling also varied by gender. The amount of money females spent ranged from a low of \$700 to a high of \$4,650 annually. The average amount spent per female was \$2,000. The males spent anywhere from a low of \$1,000 to a high of \$10,000. The males spent an average of \$5,400 on gambling (see Table 1).

## Qualitative Data Sources

**Table 1: Compulsive Gamblers (Overall)**

Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Money Spent	Type of Gambling
Female	47	White	\$1,000	Lottery/scratch-offs
Female	40	White	\$1,350	Lottery/scratch-offs; Bingo; Out of State Lottery
Female	36	White	\$4,650	Lottery/scratch-offs; Out of State Casino; Dice; Bingo; Jail house gambling
Female	33	White	\$700	Lottery/scratch-offs; Out of State Lottery
Female	30	White	\$800	Sports Betting; Horse Racing; Out of State Casino
Female	45	Black	\$3,500	Bingo; Scratch-offs
Male	22	White	\$1,800	Sports Betting; Stock Market
Male	44	White	\$5,100	Horse Racing; Office Sports Pools
Male	18	White	\$1,000	Lottery/Scratch-offs; Horse Racing
Male	42	White	\$10,000	Horse Racing
Male	24	Black	\$6,500	Dice; Sports Betting; Horse Racing
Male	22	White	\$8,000	Horse Racing; Dog Racing; Craps; Poker

Recruitment Procedure: Participants were recruited by contacting treatment agencies in Portage, Lake, and Trumbull Counties.

**Table 2: Compulsive Gamblers -- Portage County**

Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Education	Marital Status	Money Spent	Type of Gambling
Female	47	White	Some college	Single	\$1,000	Lottery/scratch-offs
Female	40	White	GED	Divorced	\$1,000 \$ 300 \$ 50	Lottery/scratch-offs Bingo Out of State Lottery
Female	36	White	GED	Single	\$2,000 \$1,500 \$1,000 \$ 150 unknown	Lottery/scratch-offs Out of State Casino Dice Bingo Jail house gambling (for cigarettes)
Female	33	White	High School	Separated	\$ 500 \$ 200	Lottery/scratch-offs Out of State Lottery
Female	30	White	Some College	Divorced	\$ 500 \$ 200 \$ 100	Sports Betting Horse Racing Out of State Casino
Female	45	Black	High School	Single	\$3,000 \$ 400 \$ 100	Bingo Scratch-offs Out of State Lottery

**Table 3: Compulsive Gamblers -- Lake County**

Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Education	Marital Status	Money Spent	Type of Gambling
Male	22	White	College Degree	Single	\$1,000 \$ 800	Sports Betting Stock Market

**Table 4: Compulsive Gamblers -- Trumbull County**

Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Education	Marital Status	Money Spent	Type of Gambling
Male	44	White	Some College	Divorced	\$5,000 \$ 100	Horse Racing Office Sports Pools
Male	18	White	GED	Single	\$1,000	Lottery/Scratch-offs
Male	42	White	GED	Divorced	\$10,000	Horse Racing
Male	24	Black	Less than High School	Single	\$3,000 \$2,000 \$1,500	Dice Sports Betting Horse Racing
Male	22	White	GED	Single	\$4,000 \$2,000 \$1,200 \$ 800	Horse Racing Dog Racing Craps Poker

Participants were asked about their primary drug of choice and the types of gambling with which they were involved. Most of the females reported that cocaine was their primary drug of choice while males reported cocaine and marijuana as drug(s) of choice. The majority of the women reported the lottery/scratch offs as their primary type of gambling activity while men reported horse racing most often (see Table 5).

**Table 5: Primary Drug(s) of Choice and Primary Gambling Type**

Gender	Age	Primary Drug(s) of Choice	Length of Time Using Drug(s) of Choice	Primary Gambling Type
Female	47	Cocaine HCL and Opioids	7 years	Lottery/Scratch-offs
Female	40	Opioids	8 years	Lottery/Scratch-offs
Female	36	Crack Cocaine	5 years	Lottery/Scratch-offs
Female	33	Crack Cocaine	4 years	Lottery/Scratch-offs
Female	30	Alcohol and Crack Cocaine	6 years	Sports Betting
Female	45	Cocaine Hydrochloride	4 years	Bingo
Male	22	Marijuana	8 years	Sports Betting
Male	44	Cocaine Hydrochloride	26 years	Horse Racing
Male	18	Crack Cocaine	5 years	Lottery/Scratch-offs
Male	42	Alcohol and Crack Cocaine	7 years	Horse Racing
Male	24	Marijuana and Alcohol	8 years	Dice
Male	22	Marijuana	14 years	Horse Racing

Of the six females interviewed, three (50%) started gambling under the age of 20 and three (50%) started gambling around age 30. Of the six males interviewed, five (83%) started gambling under the age of 22 and one (17%) started when he was 28. Only two (33%) females reported that family or friends

have ever complained about their gambling (both were told they could spend their money more wisely by their mothers). Five (83%) males had family/friend complaints. 50% of the females and 100% of the males had felt badly about their gambling, especially when they loose. All participants have spent more money than they intended on gambling. Only one female (17%) felt she had a problem with gambling, while 100% of the males felt they had a gambling problem (one has even quit because of his problem) (see Table 6).

**Table 6: Gambling Problem**

Gender	Current Age	Age started gambling?	Ever received complaints about gambling?	Ever felt badly about gambling?	Spent more money than intended?	Feel as if have a gambling problem?
Female	47	30	No	No	Yes	No
Female	40	30	No	Yes	Yes	No
Female	36	18	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Female	33	16	Yes	No	Yes	No
Female	30	28	No	Yes	Yes	No
Female	45	9	No	No	Yes	Yes
Male	22	22	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes *
Male	44	21	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Male	18	18	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Male	42	28	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Male	24	15	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Male	22	17	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

\* Has since quit gambling.

None of the females or males have ever tried to get help for their gambling problem in the past; however, several of the participants are now made aware of their problem and will incorporate it into their 12 Step Program. Four (66%) of the females and four (66%) of the males believed that gambling and drug use go hand-in-hand (they gambled more while using and gambled to buy drugs/alcohol). One female and one male commented that they didn't really start gambling until they tried to get clean (off of drugs/alcohol). Four (66%) females and five (83%) males have gambled to get money to pay debts or solve financial problems; however most agreed that it hasn't worked (see Table 7).

**Table 7: Gambling Issues**

Gender	Age	Tried to get help for gambling?	Ever participated in gambling treatment?	Relationship between alcohol/drug use and gambling.	Gambled to get money to pay debts or solve financial problems?
Female	47	No	No	Gambled more when drinking/using drugs AND gambled to buy alcohol and drugs	Yes
Female	40	No	No	Gambled more when drinking/using drugs AND gambled to buy alcohol and drugs	Yes
Female	36	No	No	Gambled to buy alcohol and drugs	Yes
Female	33	No	No	Gambled more when drinking/using drugs AND gambled to buy alcohol and drugs	No
Female	30	No	No	Gambled more when drinking/using drugs AND gambled to buy alcohol and drugs	No
Female	45	No	No	Substituted gambling for using drugs	Yes
Male	22	No	No	Substituted gambling for using drugs	Yes
Male	44	No	Yes	Gambled more when drinking/using drugs AND gambled to buy alcohol and drugs	Yes
Male	18	No	No	Gambled more when drinking/using drugs AND gambled to buy alcohol and drugs	Yes
Male	42	No	No	Gambled more when drinking/using drugs AND gambled to buy alcohol and drugs	Yes
Male	24	No	No	Gambled more when drinking/using drugs AND gambled to buy alcohol and drugs	Yes
Male	22	No	No	Gambled to buy alcohol and drugs	No

Three (50%) females and four (66%) males believed gambling has somehow interfered with their relationships; while only one (17%) female and two (33%) males felt that they or their families were in danger because of their gambling. Two (33%) females and four (66%) males believed their health had suffered because of their gambling (see Table 8).

**Table 8: Injury to self or others**

Gender	Age	Has Gambling interfered with relationships?	Ever felt self or others was in danger because of gambling?	Has gambling caused health to suffer?
Female	47	No	No	No
Female	40	No	No	No
Female	36	Yes	No	Yes
Female	33	No	Yes	No
Female	30	Yes	No	Yes
Female	45	Yes	No	No
Male	22	No	No	Yes
Male	44	Yes	No	No
Male	18	No	Yes	Yes
Male	42	Yes	Yes	Yes
Male	24	Yes	No	No
Male	22	Yes	No	Yes

Two (33%) females and four (66%) males believe they currently need help for a gambling problem. No females and only two (33%) male participants have ever been asked about gambling while in drug/alcohol treatment, one after the appointment had been made for this interview (see Table 9).

**Table 9: Help for Gambling Problem**

Gender	Age	Currently need help for a gambling problem?	Ever been asked about gambling while in treatment?
Female	47	No	No
Female	40	No	No
Female	36	Yes	No
Female	33	No	No
Female	30	No	No
Female	45	Yes	No
Male	22	No	No
Male	44	Yes	No
Male	18	Yes	No
Male	42	Yes	Yes
Male	24	Yes	Yes
Male	22	No	No

## TREATMENT PROVIDER INFORMATION

There were 10 treatment providers interviewed (one is a recovering drug user and was included in the above information because she also qualified for the rapid response protocol). Five of the providers were from Lake County; four were from Trumbull County, and one from Portage County.

In Lake County treatment providers believed that less than 10% of substance abuse clients have a problem with gambling and those clients most

commonly have a problem with scratch-offs and lottery tickets. The same is true for Portage County. In Trumbull County the numbers were somewhat higher, 25-40% of clients might have a gambling problem, again mostly with scratch-offs and lottery tickets. All of the treatment providers agreed that the gambling problems with the state lottery system are very minimal. They haven't "heard of anyone who is addicted to buying scratch-offs or every Wednesday going to get a lottery ticket." A treatment provider from Lake County even believes that his clients could "figure the odds" and would have better luck at the track.

None of the treatment providers believed their clients were "major gamblers" or that their clients make the connection between gambling and substance use. One treatment provider in Trumbull County mentioned that when he goes over addiction models with clients he discusses addiction as any behavior that you can't control or stop once you start (it includes gambling and sexual activity). Even though this provider discusses addiction models, there are no specific assessments in any of these counties that look at compulsive gambling. There are however, informal interviews done with clients about their interests, how are they spending their money, etc. Sometimes these interviews may "draw out an answer about a gambling problem." None of the agencies that were interviewed have staff qualified or certified to address gambling problems. The closest qualified staff member might be a Certified Addictions Specialist at the Alternative Correctional Program in Trumbull County (who doesn't really deal with gamblers but rather with alcohol/drug addictions). In fact, none of the treatment providers even know of any clinical resources in the area that would address the needs of compulsive gamblers.

There was no clinical evidence that these specialists could provide about how compulsive gambling negatively impacts the substance abuse recovery process; however, "off-the-cuff evidence might suggest that this type of behavior could lead an individual back to their addiction because of their obsessive-compulsive behaviors." "It just adds to their addiction. It's really another part of it."

## **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

The alcohol/drug users and gambling participants commented that they never thought about their gambling problem until they participated in this study. Many of the participants commented about how much money they have lost over the last year to gambling and wish they had it back. Participants admitted they had a gambling problem but saw it as less of an evil than a substance abuse problem. A couple of the compulsive gamblers did not even start gambling until they got into recovery. One treatment provider stated it is a "substitution of one addiction for another."

# **Alcohol/Drug Abuse and Compulsive Gambling**

**(Lucas County, Toledo, Ohio)**

An OSAM Rapid Response Report Prepared for the Ohio Department of Alcohol  
and Drug Addiction Services

January 2002 – June 2002

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## INTRODUCTION

The following is a rapid response focused research report examining issues on the relationship between compulsive gambling and drug/alcohol abuse. The focus group included participants who are currently in treatment programs for drug/alcohol abuse. The goal was to understand: 1) To what extent participants have a gambling problem; 2) Participants perceived relationship between gambling and substance abuse; 3) Types of gambling participants are involved in; 4) Effects of gambling on participants' families, and; 5) Amounts of money spent on gambling.

## METHODOLOGY, DATA SOURCES AND TIME PERIODS

Qualitative data were collected in one focus group and one individual interview coordinated on May 23, 2002. The number and type of participants are described in Table 1.

**Table 1: Qualitative Data Sources**

Date of Focus Group	Number of Participants	Description
5/23/02	3	Current Gambling Users

### Individual Interview

Date of Individual Interview	Description
5/23/02	Current Gambling User

### May 23, 2002: Individual Interview with Current Gambler

Pseudonym	Age	Ethnicity	Gender	Experience/Background
1	48	Caucasian	Female	Current Gambler (casino, bingo, lottery, scratch-offs)

### May 23, 2002: Focus Group with Current Gamblers

Pseudonym	Age	Ethnicity	Gender	Experience/Background
2	41	Caucasian	Male	Current gambler (bingo & scratch-offs)
3	44	Black	Female	Current gambler (scratch-offs, casino & bingo)
4	45	Caucasian	Female	Current gambler (casino, bingo & scratch-offs)

## OVERVIEW

Although all participants felt that they have a problem with gambling, none expressed a desire to quit. Gambling casinos in Detroit and Windsor, Ontario, Canada are less than a two hour drive from Toledo and are popular with participants.

2: *I would gamble with scratch-offs, just trying to get enough to get a hit (drugs) and it's odd because there were times when I had nothing (food, place to live), took the little money I had and spent it on tickets and blew it on heroin. It became a game sometimes.*

1: *I did both; I would get money from gambling (winnings); I would then buy enough drugs so that I would have some personal use, then sell the rest of the drugs so that I would have money to gamble. I would go back and forth.*

When asked about the types of gambling they do, participants gave the following responses:

2: Bingo, scratch-offs and playing the numbers (Ohio Lottery).

4: Scratch-offs and the casinos.

3: Casinos, scratch-offs and the Ohio Lottery.

1: *"I'm 48 and I love to gamble. The gambling that I do, I guess you could call it gambling. I used to have an after-hours place. I also do casino gambling in Detroit and Windsor."*

Participants spent varying amounts of money on gambling. When asked about the amounts spent over the course of one year, participants responded:

4: *"I spent about \$2,000 and I only make through Social Security \$6,000. That is one-third of my income; that's way too much."*

3: *"I honestly don't know because when I'm at the casinos they have an ATM machine there, so when I run out of money, I just go to the ATM and keep gambling. I would say that I spend \$140 to \$150 a week on the lottery and scratch-offs. Whenever I win, my money was recycled back into buying more tickets and more drugs."*

1: *"It all depended on my net income. I sold dope, and then I received a lawsuit settlement which was \$40,000, so between the money I made from drugs and my settlement, I figure I spent about \$35,000 over the last 6 months."*

All three focus group participants began gambling at an early age and the gambling progressed in part to support their drug addictions. Participants' gambling began to have effects on their families:

2: *"I'm on disability and my income is about one-third (1/3) of what my wife's income is; and instead of paying the bills on-time, I was gambling to support my addiction. It was a bit excessive at times; my mom is the same way. Even my brothers and sisters said that*

*I kicked the biggest drugs; now I've switched to something smaller. It's a family problem."*

*3: "My husband complains all the time; I have had to sleep on the couch on a few occasions. I recently won \$5,000 on the lottery. I didn't tell my husband. I went straight to the casino in Detroit and gambled it all. I started losing and then I began to win it back, but you see, when you start winning, the more you gamble and eventually I blew it all. I didn't even have enough to tip the valet; I just got in my car and left."*

Finally, when asked if they (the participants) had a gambling problem and if so, did they plan to seek help, the responses were:

*3: "I've got a problem with going to the casinos, but I don't plan to seek any help for it. I was going to call that number on the back of the scratch-off tickets (Gamblers Anonymous), but I didn't."*

*4: "I think it's borderline. I can't gamble now; I don't have money to gamble. But at the first of the month, I tend to think that if I spend \$10 here and \$10 there, I may get a \$100 or \$500. And I justify it by saying "At least I'm not drinking." And then that justification process starts all over again, back when I was drinking. So in answer to your question, I probably do."*

*1: "Yes I have a problem, but I just don't want to give up gambling. I mean if the spur of the moment hits me, and I want to buy some scratch-off tickets, I'm going to buy them. Or if I got a number in my head, I'm going to play it. They (the counselors) don't say too much to me about gambling, just as long as I don't do it here (the treatment facility). They know I gamble."*

## SUMMARY

All of the participants interviewed are currently in treatment programs for drug addictions. They admit to having problems with gambling, but will not give it up in the near future. During the time that they were abusing drugs and/or alcohol, gambling for all of them was a means to support their addictions.

**Alcohol/Drug Abuse and Compulsive Gambling**  
**(Mahoning & Columbiana Counties, Ohio)**

An OSAM Rapid Response Report Prepared for the Ohio Department of Alcohol  
and Drug Addiction Services

January 2002 – June 2002

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## INTRODUCTION

Four individual interviews with self-identified alcoholic/addicts in recovery, each of whom reported gambling as an issue, were conducted as part of this Rapid Response Initiative. Two of the individuals were Caucasian (one male, age 36 and one female, age 39) and two were African-American (one male, age 26 and one female, age undisclosed). Three of these participants also work at various levels in the recovery community. All reported some college education and one is a current full-time college student. Three are employed full-time, one part-time. One male reported alcohol as his primary drug of choice in the past, one male reported in the past drinking alcohol and injecting cocaine and opiates, one female reported past use of alcohol, crack, marijuana, Valium and LSD, as well as having smoked opium and hash. The remaining female reported past use of crack cocaine as her primary drug of choice, along with a long history of marijuana use as well. Reported years of recovery from substance use were 3, 13, 6 and 4.

All four individuals interviewed also reported having long-term histories of gambling activity. The 36-year-old male reported starting at age 17 for 9 years of gambling; the 50-year-old male reported starting at age 17 also for 33 years of involvement. The female who chose not to disclose her age reported starting at age 16; the 49-year-old female started at age 30 for 19 years of involvement.

Two focus groups were conducted including the Rapid Response questions for Treatment Providers. One focus group, with five participants, was conducted with professional staff from a Mahoning County Residential Detoxification Facility. The second focus group conducted with professional staff from a Columbiana County Drug & Alcohol/Mental Health Outpatient Center included 6 members. Additionally, two individual interviews completed with Law Enforcement Officers included Rapid Response questions as well.

**Table 1. Profiles of self-reported gamblers/each in substance recovery programs**

<b>#</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Employment</b>	<b>Marital Status</b>
1	36	M	Caucasian	Some college	Full Time	Single
2	26	F	Black/ African American	Some college	Full Time	Single
3	Not provided	F	Black/ African American	Some college, current student	Part Time	Separated
4	49	F	Caucasian	Some College	Full Time	Widowed

#	In Recovery	Drugs of Choice/ Years Using	Years Sober/clean	Comments
1	Y	Alcohol - 20 years	3	My relationship with alcohol changed dramatically. I started having mood swings. A real increase, over time from the age of 13 on.
2	Y	Alcohol – 23 years Injected opiates – 20 years Injected cocaine – 5 years	13	Opiates included heroin, Valium, Soma. Opiates became secondary to cocaine. Cocaine first recreational, then heroin less available, cocaine was always there. Alcohol was gradual. Heroin was an instant effect, much more quickly.
3	Y	Marijuana – 28 years Crack cocaine – 10 years	4	My relationship with marijuana changed, got to the point where I couldn't function, had to smoke when I got up in the morning.
4	Y	Alcohol – 30 years Marijuana – 25 years Snort cocaine – 15 years Others, Valium, snort heroin, LSD, opium, hash	6	My use of all substances increased; I developed a habit. Now I have a whole new life, it is wonderful. I have peace in my life today.

**Table 2. Gambling Information by Participant:**

Participant # 1 – 36 year old Caucasian Male

Rank	Type of Gambling	Money Spent in last year
1	Ohio operated lottery	\$3,000 in 36 days
2	Out of state lottery, PA	\$1,000 in 36 days
3	Sports betting	\$1,000 in 36 days

Participant #2 – 50 year old Black/African-American Male

Rank	Type of Gambling	Money Spent in last year
1 & 2	Ohio operated lottery	\$7,8000 \$8,000, maybe up to \$9,000 or \$10,000
3	Office sports pools	\$20
4	Bookie	\$360
5	Out of state lottery, PA	\$200
6	Casino Niagra	\$200

Participant #3 – Age unlisted Black/African American Female

Rank	Type of gambling	Money Spent in last year
1	Community operated, Bingo	\$7,800
2	Mountaineer	\$1,200
3	Ohio operated lottery, scratch-offs	\$100
4	Out-of-state casino, Harrah's/St. Louis, Casino Niagra	\$300

Participant #4 – 49 year old Caucasian Female

Rank	Type of gambling	Money Spent in last year
1 & 2	Ohio operated lottery, scratch-offs	\$2,080
3	Community-operated, Bingo	\$300
4	Atlantic City, Ladbrook's, Mountaineer	\$2,000
5	Organized illegal, numbers, sports betting, bookie	\$2,000
6	Out-of-state lottery, WVA	\$100

**Compulsive Gambling**

***Age at start of gambling?***

Ages reported were respectively 17, 17, 16 and 30. Participant #1 said it was very addictive and unmanageable, and that he started with the Ohio lottery. He stated that he started with a few dollars a day, then got up to \$50-100 a day. Participant #2 stated that he started with cards, and dice in the neighborhood. Then he went on to sports betting such as boxing, football and heavyweight fights. Respondent #3 reported that a friend of the family got her started gambling. Respondent #4 said she started in “Vegas” on slot machines, and then started on the lottery.

***Friends/family complain about gambling?***

Participant #1 stated mostly his parents complained, that they noticed a change in this attitude and noticed jewelry missing. When compulsively gambling, he found “ways and means” of getting money. Participant #2 said that on occasion, family would complain when he did something stupid. He reported stopping off at the store, playing 12 scratch-offs, then another 12, then went back for 12 and 12 more. He spent \$48 dollars, won \$24. Participant #3 said her family gambles, so they wouldn't say anything about her gambling. She states people in recovery talk about it as “part of my disease.” Participant #4 states her family would rather have something to show for it (the money spent), and that she totally agrees with them.

***Ever felt badly about gambling?***

When participants were asked if they ever felt bad about their gambling, they responded in several ways:

#1: *“Not when gambling – don't really care. You're in that constant high. Feel remorse and guilt for what you did, but that passes quickly, then off on a roll again.”*

#2: *“After I’ve spent it, the guilt comes into play. When I hit, I hit pretty good. That keeps me coming back, but it by no means balances out.”*

#3: *“It had gotten just like using a chemical or drug. I had direct deposit of my checks and would go and get money and hit the road and wasn’t paying normal expenses. It was devastating. My lights would be out, and my mother would think I was using drugs again.”*

#4: *“Sure, feel awful, sick about the money and not winning. Had money spent before I even won it (in my fantasies), and then get mad when I don’t win.”*

### ***Ever spent more money on gambling than intended?***

All respondents indicated that this has been a problem, using phrases like being in the “groove” and “in the zone.” They talked about concentrating on winning and ending up broke, and not paying bills.

### ***Do you have a problem with gambling? And when did you first notice a problem?***

All of the individually interviewed participants stated they did have a gambling problem. One stated *“anything I obsess about is a problem.”* Another reported not having money to buy groceries and cigarettes, and knowing that *“there is something wrong with this.”*

There was a range of answers to the “age of acknowledging” that there was a problem. This ranged from when manipulating and deceiving to get money to go to Bingo, to doing a lot of illegal acts, or living in the “dream world.” One stated he had used gambling as an escape. All agreed that the gambling activities had worsened over time for them.

### ***Ever gotten help for a gambling problem?***

When asked if they had ever sought help with their gambling, three individual respondents reported receiving no help with gambling issues, although one reported using the NA 12-step program to deal with obsessive and compulsive issues. Another reported she used AA and Overeaters Anonymous, and that she “always pulls it back together.” Only one interviewee acknowledged participation in gambling during probation, when he got caught with illegal poker machines. He states he did not seek help at that time, but has since joined GA (Gamblers Anonymous). He reports that GA is “awesome,” and that he goes to meetings, and is getting the tools of recovery and that he talks to a GA sponsor.

### ***Relationship between alcohol/other drugs and gambling.***

When asked if they perceived a relationship between substance abuse and gambling, participants gave a range of responses:

- *“All very serious diseases. In my eyes, gambling is probably the worse. Alcohol started it all. When I drank, I gambled more than I usually would.”*

- *“When I was using, I didn’t gamble at all, the money was going to buy drugs.”*
- *“When using would gamble more, then lose big time.”*
- *“Cocaine wouldn’t let me gamble, only had 50 cents.”*
- *“Oh yeah, no fear when I was using, easy come, easy go. I depleted 2 inheritances.”*

### ***Gambled to solve financial problems?***

One participant stated that money to pay debts was the idea of his illegal actions, like quick schemes, bus trips for a profit (on sports betting) or signing on loans to consolidate debt and taking a couple extra thousand and spending it on gambling. Another said he would set aside money for his bills, tying up the money in money orders so that he couldn’t spend it on gambling, and in that way he tried to keep up with his obligations. Another stated she did not have financial problems, but she had spent all the money she inherited and that that money was not therefore available to her family now. The last participant reported she had tried to solve problems by gambling, and it usually didn’t work, but when she would hit, it would “hook her” even further.

### ***Has Gambling interfered with relationships?***

Only one participant indicated problems in this area. He stated that it devastated his parents, sister and her husband, his niece and nephew. And that basically the trust factor had been a problem, with the lying, manipulating and conning. He reported that when he was on a binge, “on that high,” he would be gone for days, and didn’t want “nobody” bothering him, and didn’t call. One male participant stated that all his family are gamblers, and one female participant stated that her father was a gambler and died when he was hit by a car leaving a “gambling house.” Both reported that gambling was the “norm” for them.

### ***Danger or health problems due to gambling?***

Reports varied in this area:

- *“Couple times, guys I owed money to came to the door. Me being the baby, they (my parents) bailed me out, they were my enablers.”*
- *“When on a roll I didn’t eat or sleep, trying to get to that next bet. Once out of money and burning the candle at both ends, I would think, ‘why do I put my self though this?’ I would be sleeping in my car with no food for 4 or 5 days.”*
- *“When gambling, was scared to leave, paranoid I might be “set up.” (This is like dealing drugs; you don’t know how much money you have, just cramming it in different pockets, afraid.)”*
- *“Worried, last quarter gone, upset about what you have done.”*

- *“No danger, but feel sick. Could have bought a dining room set.”*

### ***Problem gambling/offered help with gambling?***

When asked if they felt they needed help with gambling, three of the participants denied a need for help. One stated that, *“this is a life long process, just like other addictions.”* None of the four reported being asked about their gambling while in treatment. One man reported he did not consider gambling a problem when he got help for his alcohol addiction and that no one asked him about gambling. Another stated that in treatment they only focused on the “mood altering chemicals.” A third stated they only talked about the drugs. The last participant stated that when she was in treatment, in a facility in Southern OH, they got them Bingo scratch-offs when they made cigarette runs and that they did them all day long. She reports that was her introduction to that mode of gambling. She stated, *“now two ‘sickies’ don’t make a well!”*

### ***Final comments by individual interviewees.***

One stated, “this is very, very serious.” That first bet is like the first drink to an alcoholic. Another recommended that treatment facilities ask about gambling, that usually clients don’t mention it. A third stated that she believes gambling should be banished from treatment facilities. Another stated that her way of dealing with it is to put up “roadblocks.” She states that she schedules her classes at the same time she used to gamble, so she won’t be tempted. The first interviewee stated that we could deal with gambling in recovery if it was identified as a disease, and that is not happening now, because it not seen for the addictive behavior it is.

### **Rapid Response Interviews with Law Enforcement Officers.**

One officer had heard of card playing and dice tables in Campbell, but didn’t know how severe it was or what were the stakes. He reported street gambling on the East Side of Youngstown, where his beat is, but that *“by the time they see me, everybody is running, kids and adults.”* He reported that he has heard of people spending bill money. This officer then identified himself as a “man of God” and reported his belief that gambling is morally wrong. He recounted an event 1 ½ years ago on the East Side when a teenager, aged 18, was killed over not wanting to pay a \$5 gambling debt. He said that action was what made their agency look into a large drug ring that was operating, and he stated that they were connected. He talked about the issues of bankruptcy, crime, incarceration, and potential loss of family that goes with trying to get your money back through gambling. He indicated interest in helping people through his church, through mentoring programs and positive support.

The other officer, from a small size city, stated that the gamblers in his community were predominantly middle-aged with good jobs and family settings. He initially stated that he did not see a connection with gambling and drug use. He reported seeing one person playing the lottery with a credit card in a convenience store, and stated that sent a “flag up,” as to why charge it, if you can’t afford it. He talked about the “Bug,” a numbers game played 40-50 years ago that was once very common and played every day. Then

the lottery came in with the same effect. Later in the interview, the officer stated that it can be an addiction, that some enjoy it at “whatever cost.” He noted that drugs alter your mind, but that he cannot see what they get out of gambling. He noted that he has seen people buy \$150 in scratch-off tickets, and he cannot see the logic as to “why they do these things.” Then at another point again, he talked of the “thrill” and the “sickness” of gambling.

### **Treatment Provider Focus Groups**

**In the Mahoning County focus group a number of issues were raised:**

- Possible connection to the “underground”, gangsters.
- Clients do not see a relationship to the thrill-seeking of gambling.
- Providers stated that no questions about gambling were asked during assessment, but believe clients are involved in poker, numbers and cards.
- Don’t believe staff trained to deal with gambling, but do routinely deal with addictive behavior.
- Did not know how to contact GA.

**In the Columbiana County focus groups, issues raised included:**

- Some people report involvement in gambling, but many don’t have money for gambling.
- We have seen several severe cases, one who was a horse trainer and lived in his car, and one who had to take the Internet out due to pervasive gambling.
- Saw one client who took \$5000 out on their house to play the “big one” (Lottery).
- “We don’t assess for gambling, but we do ask about behavioral, recreational, credit problems and it will come up there.”
- Some don’t see it as a problem, like marijuana, could be doing a “lot worse.”
- Dog and cock fighting are seen in the southern part of this county.
- More clients report problems with pornography, and maxing out credit cards on the Internet than gambling compulsively.
- Sometimes the compulsive behavior is in shopping; one lady maxed out 6 credit cards with shopping.

- If our clients are gambling, there is a strong “no talk” rule. Sometimes you hear a mention of a “smorgasbord” with gambling, moonshine and other drugs laid out. Clients state in the macho mode, “It don’t get no better than that.”

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Youngstown and the surrounding areas are communities where gambling is “so common.”
- Gambling is an issue that should be assessed upon entering chemical dependency treatment or seeking services, so as to permit drawing the connections to compulsive behavior more clearly.