Gambling and Internet addictions – epidemiology and treatment
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Combining gambling and internet addiction in one single outlet is a timely initiative for clinicians, health professionals and even the general public. This book, edited by Bernadeta Lelonek-Kuleta and Joanna Chwaszcz, covers a wide range of topics and brings valuable and up to date information. Among the various topics discussed, the readers will learn about risk factors, epidemiology, similarities and differences between behavioral and substance addiction, characteristics and principles of treatment available, self-help issues and the importance of social support in recovery. In one word, this book is a “MUST” for anyone interested in gambling and internet addiction. It will not only increase your knowledge on these topics, but will provide some practical skills in coping with gambling and internet addictions. Simply outstanding!

Professor Robert Ladouceur
Chapter 4
Self-help books supporting pathological gamblers in recovery – review and assessment

Bernadeta Lelonek-Kuleta

Abstract
Gambling has been found to become more and more popular among Poles. Studies show that each year, the number of individuals reporting for professional advice in solving problems associated with gambling is growing. Based on epidemiological data, the number of patients undergoing gambling addiction treatment is not high in Poland. What has been observed among persons experiencing various disorders is their embarrassment over reporting for advice, even though they are aware of the need to receive such advice. Therefore, some pathological gamblers make attempts to overcome their addiction on their own, with more or less success. In order to meet the needs of such individuals, professionals have been developing textbooks to support addicted gamblers in their recovery. This article presents an overview of selected self-help textbooks for pathological gamblers.

Keywords: pathological gambling, self-help, guide, treatment, addiction

Introduction
Recent studies on problem gambling in Poland show that 57% of adult Poles play games of chance for money, and 7.1% of Poles (aged 15+) gamble everyday or several times a week (Ratajska & Furman-Kwiatkowska, 2015; Badora, Gwiazda, Herrmann, Kalka & Moskalewicz, 2015). Considering the overall population of Poland, gambling addiction symptoms are found in 5.3% of society (aged 15+), including 0.7% of persons at a high risk of gambling addiction. As many as 2.2% of gamblers are at risk of developing moderate addiction, and another 2.2% are problem gamblers (Badora, Gwiazda, Herrmann, Kalka & Moskalewicz, 2015). Given the above considerations, it might seem surprising that only a relatively small number of persons report for gambling addiction treatment. According to the National Health Fund (NFZ) data, in 2013, within the public healthcare system 3 141 patients were
treated for gambling addiction (had been diagnosed as pathological gamblers) (as cited in: Bukowska, 2015).

Indeed, some health professionals argue that participation in professional counselling is not more likely to treat addiction than non-participation. In relation to addiction treatment, a similar success rate to that for counselling has been observed for self-treatment (Orford, 2001). Orford further claims that different forms of therapy do not differ in terms of their effectiveness (a similar success rate, regardless of patient attitude, has been reported for participation in meetings, self-help groups, and use of various forms of non-professional assistance). On the one hand, this could call into question the purposefulness of efforts taken to improve treatment options for addicts. On the other, however, such reports suggest that a number of people make efforts to overcome their addiction on their own, without reporting to a professional, and achieve success. According to experts, only between 7% and 10% of pathological gamblers report for professional counselling (Romo, Gorsane, Caillon, Ladouceur & Reynaud, 2014). There might be different reasons for choosing not to seek professional counselling (Chevalier, Geoffrion, Audet, Papineau & Kimpton, 2003; Rockloff & Schofield, 2004; Pulford et al., 2009; Suurvali, Cordingley, Hodgins & Cunningham, 2009). First of all, addicts can feel embarrassed to reveal their weaknesses to a stranger. They can have negative experiences connected with reporting to professionals or professional facilities in general. Many people do not believe psychological therapy to be effective, claiming that mere talking will not help them (such people prefer pharmacological treatment). Another problem is counsellor accessibility. While in big cities, the counselling services available for gambling addicts continue to be expanded, in smaller towns the situation might be more difficult (Chwaszcz & Lelonek-Kuleta, 2015). Counsellors themselves have reported a strong need for further education and qualification programmes to support them in their work with behavioural addicts, including gamblers (Chwaszcz & Lelonek-Kuleta, 2011). For some addicts, costs generated by their journeys to and from the counsellor are too high, especially when they are trying to ameliorate their finances that have been strained by gambling. Yet others are convinced that they cannot devote their time to counselling, since they must remedy their desperate life situation. Persons representing all these attitudes will not report for professional treatment, even though they do acknowledge their problem and the need to address it. Such individuals will independently seek support, using the available, usually online, resources. An interesting form of assistance that has been offered to gamblers in Western Europe and America for over a dozen years, are self-help books. Such books, published in printed and electronic forms, encourage gamblers to individually go through the steps to recovery. Below you will find an overview of selected self-help books, and a description of their use and contents.
Self-help books – an overview


This book, written by Alex Blaszczynski, an Australian authority on gambling, was published almost twenty years ago. It includes two parts, an informational one and a guidance one. Its author recommends it both as a self-help tool, and as a supplement to therapy or self-help groups, such as GA, etc. The book can also serve as a reference for gamblers’ family members or loved ones. Blaszczynski notes a number of contraindications to using the book as the only form of treatment. These include mental disorders, high risk of suicide, alcohol dependence, strong pressure from another person to change, denial, gambling as the manifestation of relationship problems, nervous system damage, and intellectual disability. The book is based on the cognitive-behavioural approach.

The first, informational, part “About problem gambling” addresses the following issues:
- What is gambling and when is it a problem?
- How does the problem develop?
- Who is at risk of being affected?
- What is the impact of problem gambling on the gambler?
- What is the effect of problem gambling on family members and others?
- How can problem gambling be treated?
- The goals of treatment: abstinence or control?
- A short technical note (definitions, etc.).

Part two, “Overcoming problem gambling: A self-help guide” describes the steps to be taken by the gamblers using the book as a guide to support their recovery:
- Step 1 – Working on your motivation to stop.
- Step 2 – Monitoring your gambling.
- Step 3 – Controlling your urge using a relaxation technique.
- Step 4 – Controlling gambling-related cues.
- Step 5 – Identifying irrational ideas; How to stop chasing losses.
- Step 6 – Preventing relapses.
- Step 7 – How your family can help.

At the end, the author provides a list of useful addresses and useful reading. There are also extra monitoring sheets attached.

In concluding remarks, the author notes that in the case of problem gamblers complete abstinence is the most reliable way towards problem management. He encourages readers to read the book several times, to go back to it from time to time, and to continuously practise the acquired skills (e.g. regularly apply relaxation techniques). He also invites them to seek support from other people, including professionals, in situations in which it would be too difficult for them to cope on their own with the urge to play.

This workbook was developed by Robert Ladouceur, a Canadian authority on gambling addiction, in cooperation with Stella Lechance. Its first issued in 2000 in French (as a non-published training material entitled Programme d’évaluation et de traitement des joueurs excessifs). The issue discussed here comprises two parts – a workbook for gamblers is accompanied by a guide for therapists (Overcoming Pathological Gambling: Therapist Guide), which makes it possible to use the book as an integral part of therapy. Therapists can find commentary on the tasks for patients, and can use it in their counselling.

The authors recommend their workbook as a reference tool for professional psychotherapy, hence the two parts. Both in the patient workbook and the therapist guide, each section corresponds to one counselling session. Each session is preceded by objectives to be accomplished at a given stage. At the beginning of each session, the therapist and the patient analyse the self-assessment sheet (attached). The authors emphasize that this joint analysis is a crucial element of therapy. Each session concludes with the list of tasks to be completed by the patient at home. These tasks are later analysed together with the therapist. The therapist guide has the same order of sections as the patient workbook, and this is the order to be followed during therapy. However, the authors of this book emphasize how important it is for the therapist to be flexible and to adjust to the needs of the patient. Based on their own experience in working with patients, they note that some patients need more time to internalise the content of each session.

The book comprises the following parts:
Chapter 1 Introduction:
- Learning about pathological gambling.
- Learning about this treatment programme and what it will involve.
Chapter 2 Pretreatment assessment
Chapter 3 Session 1
- Enhancing motivation to change.
- Clarifying treatment goals.
Chapter 4 Sessions 2 & 3
Behavourial interventions:
- Chain of events that leads to excessive gambling.
- High-risk situations.
- Identifying coping strategies that can be used to avoid high-risk situations.
Chapter 5 Session 4
- Discussing in detail one’s most recent gambling session.
- Identifying the erroneous thoughts that one had before, during, and after the gambling session.
Chapter 6 Sessions 5–7 – Cognitive interventions
- Discussing one’s gambling sessions.
- The concept of chance and the specific nature of games of chance.
- Becoming aware of one’s inner dialogue regarding gambling.
- The influence of this inner dialogue on one’s decisions to gamble.
- Gambling traps.
- Recognizing one’s erroneous thoughts.
Chapter 7 Sessions 8–10 – Cognitive interventions
- Recognizing the erroneous thoughts that lead to gambling, developing skills for challenging and casting doubt on these thoughts and realizing that one has the power to decide to gamble or not.

Chapter 8 Sessions 11 & 12
- Preventing relapse, relapse as a recovery stage, the risk of a slip or relapse, developing strategies that will help prevent slips or a relapse, strategies in case of a slip/relapse.

Chapter 9 Post-treatment assessment.
Chapter 10 Follow-up assessment.

The book includes introductions to each chapter. It has a lot of exercises for readers to complete on their own. Each chapter first identifies the objectives to be accomplished. The book is very clear, includes tables and diagrams, and enumerates its key points, which makes it user-friendly. Corresponding books for the therapist and for the patient constitute a very valuable tool for counselling, as they can be used either by following all the sessions in succession, or by selecting only some of them to incorporate them in therapy. What is particularly noteworthy is the number of tasks and issues to be addressed by the patient, which can make the book actually useful as a practical guide, rather than merely a theoretical reference.


Written by French specialists, this book is one of the latest self-help guides for gamblers. Its authors focus on cognitive and behavioural therapeutic techniques, and use the motivational interviewing approach. It can be used as an independent self-help reference, since its target group are primarily the individuals who can find it difficult to report to a counselor. As noted by its authors, the book can be also helpful for the close relatives of problem gamblers, and can support therapists in their work. It includes an informational part which describes the specific nature of problem gambling, its symptoms and consequences. It presents different ways of dealing with excessive gambling. In addition, the authors address the issues that can be faced by the family of a problem gambler, provide answers to frequently asked questions, and offer guidance. Furthermore, they explore the issue of gambling among teenagers and the elderly.

The book comprises three parts:
- Part 1 – Understanding my problem – its purpose is to introduce the issue of problem gambling and its relationship with the notion of addiction, explain the notion of addiction, and describe how addiction and problem gambling develop.
  - What is problem gambling?
  - Which player for which game?
  - Why change the nature of my gambling?
  - My gambling problem.
  - What problems are associated with problem gambling?
Part 2 – Taking action – its purpose is to familiarise the reader with the basics of cognitive-behavioural therapy, prepare the reader for making a change in their own life, assess the importance of gambling in the reader's life, and identify personal change objectives.

- Basics of cognitive and behavioural therapy.
- What is my gambling like?
- Managing emotions, thoughts and behaviour.

Part 3 – Obtaining knowledge – its goal is to provide knowledge on the efforts to use pharmacotheapy in the treatment of gambling disorders, and to make readers realise that some pharmaceuticals can contribute to loosing control over one's gambling.

- Available pharmaceuticals.
- How self-help groups work?
- Are self-treatment and protective factors real?
- Excessive gambling – questions from close relatives.
- The problem of all age groups: teenagers and the elderly.
- Online support programme.
- Other psychotherapeutic approaches.

In addition, the book provides self-assessment questionnaires, the Gamblers Anonymous programme, and some useful links.

Each paragraph is followed by a brief summary of its content. The book contains exercises for the reader, questionnaires, work plans, guidelines and recommendations. In addition, it includes descriptions of problem gambler stories. The book has a relatively high number of references to scientific research on addiction, and provides considerable theoretical knowledge, which also makes it a valuable read for professionals.


This Canadian book, published in 1999 by the Addictions Foundation of Manitoba, is available free of charge in its electronic versions in English and French (Habitudes de jeu. Manuel d’autoformation. Est-ce que j’ai un problème de jeu?). Its authors wrote it on the basis of their own professional experience in working with people struggling with gambling problems. Generally, it serves as a self-help book to help the reader better understand their gambling, especially if it has become problematic. Authors claim that it was designed to be used successfully without additional assistance. The knowledge and skills obtained through independent work with the book can be helpful for anyone who wants to cut down their gambling or stop gambling completely.

The book is divided into five chapters:

Chapter 1 – Gambling self assessment (its goal is for the reader to answer the question Do I have a problem with gambling?).

Chapter 2 – Managing my money (its goal is to learn how to manage one's own money to balance one's budget).

Chapter 3 – My gambling patterns and triggers (its goal is to understand how and why one gambles).
Chapter 4 – Filling the void (guidelines on what the reader can do when they are no longer gambling).

Chapter 5 – Maintaining a healthy lifestyle (provides information about keeping on track).

Closing exercise – my new personal goals.

Each chapter follows a certain pattern:

- An overview, information on the topics and exercises.
- An invitation to record one's daily activities as a way of tracking one's progress.
- A checklist to review one's work and help the reader decide if they are ready to move on.

The authors suggest that the reader start with Chapter 1 and do Chapter 5 last, while Chapters 2, 3 and 4 can be used in individually chosen order, depending on the gambling-related issues experienced by the reader. Should the reader have problems with independent work, the authors provide a problem gambling help line number.


Published in 2003, this book is available free of charge in electronic form and was written by Canadian specialists from the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. It is intended for anyone who wants to reduce their gambling to make it less harmful, or to quit it completely. Its authors recommend it also to anyone who has just begun to experience problems as a result of gambling but did not think it was serious enough to seek professional treatment (participate in a therapy or go to GA). Completing the programme can prevent the reader from developing more serious problems. The authors explain that most gamblers attend treatment an average of six times (before they quit), which is why the programme can be completed in six weeks.

Therefore, in total, the programme includes six topics. Each topic has a brief introduction, some information for the reader to think about, and an exercise for the reader to work on.

Treatment Topic 1 – Setting goals – the goal is to define one's objectives in respect of gambling. This is to guide the reader's efforts throughout the programme. The authors identify two types of goals – reducing or quitting gambling completely. The book provides guidance on how to accomplish each of these.

Treatment Topic 2 – Strengthening your commitment – the purpose of this stage is to build and strengthen one's motivation to change the character of one's involvement in gambling. The authors note that often the reason to seek help are sudden problems caused by gambling. However, as they subside, people might abandon their efforts to break the habit. Therefore, it is crucial to examine the role of gambling in one's life and its consequences, as well as one's hierarchy of values, in a very thorough and honest way.

Treatment Topic 3 – Taking action – at this stage, the programme focuses on changing one's gambling behaviour and developing a new, healthier lifestyle. It also discusses the is-
sue of urges, temptations and cravings, which most gamblers experience, and how to cope with them.

Treatment Topic 4 – Tracking your thoughts – this topic addresses the importance of one's beliefs about gambling and chances of winning for the process of recovery. The reader will understand their beliefs, learn how to identify erroneous thoughts that push them into gambling (e.g. their confidence that they will win) and to replace these beliefs with appropriate, or reasonable, thoughts.

Treatment Topic 5 – Healing relationships – at this stage, the reader will work on the important relationships that could have been strained or even severed as a result of gambling. They will learn how to relate their gambling behaviour to the quality of their relationships, and how to improve these relationships.

Treatment Topic 6 – Looking to the future – this final stage is to prepare the gambler for potential difficulties they might face along the way, and to provide them with the necessary coping skills. This topic also summarizes all previous steps, including the elements that proved the most helpful.

Each section of the book has a number of overviews, summaries, guidelines and exercises for the reader. There are also self-assessment questionnaires. Crucial content is highlighted in the form of boxes, etc. to make the book more user-friendly and clear. This is even more important, given that the authors designed it as a self-help book. At the end of the book, there is also a list of Ontario Association of Credit Counselling Services (OACCS) Member Agencies, along with their contact information.


This book was written in the USA by specialists working with pathological gamblers, and in 2010 it was translated into Polish and published in Poland. Although its target audience are individuals who would like to deal with their gambling problem on their own, the authors make it clear that in some cases additional assistance might be recommended. The programme described in the book can also be used in the course of professional therapy.

In the introduction, the authors explain the objectives behind the self-help workbook. These objectives are to help the reader understand: (1) their gambling behaviour, (2) why they gamble, and (3) how gambling may have become a problem in their life. This information is to provide the reader with ways to help stop or reduce their gambling.

The workbook is divided into five chapters, each of which focuses on a different aspect of gambling. The chapters are further divided into sections or topics that contain several paper exercises. The purpose of these exercises is to help the reader think about the relevance of each topic to their situation.

The authors recommend that the reader go through the material included in the workbook at their own pace. The workbook may be used individually or with the guidance of a counsellor.

The book addresses the following issues:

Introduction
Chapter 1: Do you have a gambling problem?
Chapter 2: What to do about it?
Chapter 3: Changing old habits.
Chapter 4: Developing new habits.
Chapter 5: Reviewing your progress.
Appendix: Resources.

The book ends with an appendix that includes a gambling diary and some useful links.

The book includes mainly exercises to be completed by the reader. There is little theoretical information and virtually no extensive practical descriptions. All this makes the workbook rather concise and short (31 pages, making it the shortest of all the books discussed here), which can encourage gamblers to use it. As a workbook, it will certainly make a useful tool for gamblers to work on overcoming their addiction.

Conclusions

To overcome excessive gambling is an arduous and difficult task. Similarly to other addictions, pathological gambling is a recurring disorder, which makes “rapid recovery” unlikely. What is needed is long-term support, motivation to continue in one’s efforts despite any setbacks, and tailor-made solutions to meet the needs of each patient. In these efforts, one can rely on various forms of support, including self-help guides. Whether the patient uses counselling services, prefers group meetings, or is far from seeking institutionalised assistance, using a self-help guide to look inside oneself might help excessive gamblers deal with their problem. Of all the books presented above, only one is available in Polish, but determined efforts made in the field of gambling problem solving offer hope that over time the number of publications available in the Polish language will grow.

References


