

Responsible Gambling Strategy in Spain

1. Introduction

The approval of Law 13/2011 on the regulation of gaming was a very momentous time both in terms of its possible impact on gamblers and on citizens in general, and because of the opportunities it provides to globally and collectively tackle responsible gaming in our country.

At this moment there is a great lack of knowledge about the impact of pathological gambling or gambling addiction on the population, as well as a lack of public awareness of the importance and magnitude of this problem. This is why generating and implementing a strategy both to raise public awareness and to provide the means to prevent and treat the phenomena of problem gambling is more necessary than ever before.

Civil society, the gambling industry, the Government of Spain and those of the Autonomous Regions must participate in drafting the Responsible Gaming Strategy: This will be the cornerstone in approaching responsible gaming. The Spanish Responsible Gaming Strategy is, therefore, a product of the joint action of private associations, the community, the gambling industry and the Government.

The creation of a Responsible Gaming Advisory Council (in Spanish, CAJR) will serve as meeting point for the various stakeholders to work together in order to achieve an ethical and responsible approach to gambling in Spain. The Council will provide advice to the Directorate General for the Regulation of Gambling on the determination of the responsible gaming strategy for Spain, and in the implementation of the Responsible Gaming Programme derived from it. The CAJR is formed by prestigious professionals from both the research and professional field related to tasks for the prevention and treatment of gambling addiction problems, of the gambling industry itself and the Administration. The Secretariat of the Advisory Council is managed by a representative of the Directorate General for the Regulation of Gambling.

2. Gambling, its costs and benefits

Gambling is a common activity in all societies and cultures, and it has been so since ancient times. For most people this activity is merely a distraction with no kind of negative consequences. Various studies show that 70-90% of the teenage and adult population has gambled on some occasion.

In relation to the perception of gambling in the general public, there has been an analysis of the motivations of social players, noting that fun expectations are the most popular in responsible players (Loroz, 2004). Various authors bring to light the psychological benefits of gambling for the elderly, like improving self-esteem. To gamble moderately, have fun and escape from physical and emotional difficulties associated with old age can be highly rewarding activities.

However, gambling is considered by many as a negative behaviour that does not provide benefits to society. Various international studies have inquired about the public opinion on gambling, and the results show that the community is usually divided: One sector of the population is favourable to gambling, considering that it is a fun and exciting activity, while another felt that this was a potentially addictive and negative behaviour, in terms of socialising (favouring isolation and solitude). Therefore, gambling seems to be an activity closely linked to social values. A clear example is that if a game is presented as a way to raise funds for social actions, the perception is much more positive than that of other games of chance.

The most important risk factor associated with gambling is to devote more than a reasonable time (the person is too focused on this activity), to spend more money than the person can afford or initially planned, and to generate high levels of excitement or significant activation while playing.

Various authors and scholars of the gambling addiction phenomena stipulate that there are problems with gambling:

- when the gambling activity produces a range of adverse consequences that affect the safety and welfare of consumers or their family members or friends,
- when there are negative impacts that extend to the whole community.

All in all, for many people gambling is a leisure activity and a pleasant entertainment. For some, however, gambling can lead to problems.

The variables that have been associated with low-risk behaviours, or to **good gambling practices** have been:

- 1) Playing certain types of game (slot machines are always perceived as higher risk) (Breen & Zimmerman, 2002; Welte et al., 2004).
- 2) Accessibility to the most addictive games (there must be a relation between availability and risk profile) (Cox et al, 2005; Williams et al., 2007).
- 3) Frequency, speed and quantity of bets (Currie et al., 2006, 2008; Weinstock et al, 2007).

Some factors that have been **associated with a greater risk** have been:

- 1) Male (Bondolfi et al., 2000; Ladouceur et al., 1999; Volberg et al., 2001). There are very few studies which point to women as a high-risk group, except in ethnic minorities (Wardman et al., 2001; Penelope et al., 2012).
- 2) Urban areas (Volberg et al., 2001).
- 3) Low-income or unemployed people (NRC, 1999; Potenza et al, 2001; Volberg et al., 2001).
- 4) Belief that the game may be a way to increase income, gambling as their only pastime and gambling to regulate/escape negative emotional states (Jimenez-Murcia et al., 2010; Jimenez-Murcia et al., in press).

The almost universal access to gambling by remote and interactive media introduces a new vision about the potential impact of gambling addiction:

- It means greater accessibility to the world of gambling and therefore a greater risk.
- Perhaps the greatest risk lies with the youth population:
 - Online players are, in many cases, young people over 18 with gambling and dedication patterns that could make them more prone to become problematic players.
 - Social gaming is a widespread phenomenon among young people: friends and family play an important role in the experience of the young and their access to the games via Internet.
 - The main challenge for parents in relation to online gambling by minors is to promote the right attitudes, raise their children's awareness and pay special attention to preventing addictions.
- On the other hand, online regulated games involve the possibility for regulators and operators to have greater control, as they can restrict access to online games of chance.

3. The economic, regulatory and social context of gambling in Spain

3.1. Gambling activity in Spain: some relevant figures

In 2012, an annual volume of about 26,000 million euros was wagered in the gambling sector in Spain, of which practically 43% corresponded to the demand of the National Lottery and Betting Organisation and the ONCE, 36% to the demand of B and C machines, 7% to bingo, 4% to table games in casinos, 10% to online gambling, although the latter has been quickly gaining ground.

It is estimated that over 70% of Spanish citizens have played games of chance at some stage in their lives. At present, approximately 1.3 million players are registered with authorised online gaming operators in Spain.

3.2. Regulations on responsible gaming within the State and Autonomous Regions

As mentioned above, the approval of Law 13/2011 represents a milestone as regards the management of responsible gaming taken with a global and comprehensive approach towards the phenomenon. Article 8 of the Law refers to consumer protection and responsible gaming policies, establishing that:

1. Responsible gaming policies imply that gaming activities shall stem from a comprehensive policy of corporate social responsibility which considers gambling as a complex phenomenon in which it is necessary to combine awareness with preventive, intervention and control actions, as well as the repair of any negative effects that may be caused.

The preventive actions will focus on raising awareness, informing and disseminating good gambling practices, as well as the possible effects that inappropriate gambling practices can cause.

Gaming operators shall draw up a series of measures related to mitigating the possible damaging effects that gambling may cause to persons, and they shall incorporate the basic regulations for a responsible gaming policy. Therefore, in regard to consumer protection it is necessary to:

- a) Pay proper attention to risk groups.
- b) Provide the public with the necessary information to enable them to make a conscious choice of their gambling activities, promoting non-compulsive, responsible and moderate gaming attitudes.
- c) According to the nature and means used in each game, inform of the prohibition to participate in games by minors and persons included in

the General Register of Gaming Access Bans, or in the Register of People Linked to Gaming Operators.

2. Operators will be unable to grant loans or any other type of credit or financial assistance to participants.

Likewise, the Law establishes that operating companies shall carry out an Operational Plan that takes into account the principles of responsible gaming, employee training, distribution channels, game design and other aspects of their activity that are established by regulation.

Meanwhile, Article 21.9 of the previously mentioned Law establishes that the regulator's duties include "ensuring the protection of participants and vulnerable populations' interests...", which has led the DGOJ to approach the issue from a global perspective, and to propose the initiative.

Each Autonomous Region has the competence to regulate presence-based gambling in their respective territories. Article 34 of Law 13/2011 establishes the Gambling Policy Council as the body responsible for participation and coordination of gambling matters in the Autonomous Regions and the State.

In turn, Article 35 establishes the powers of the Gambling Policy Council and states that, among other issues, the Council will deal with the following issues:

... f).- The coordination of regulatory measures for protecting minors and dependent persons.

... h).- In general, any aspect of gambling activities whose nature requires the coordinated action of state and regional authorities.

A common strategy of Responsible Gaming may only be coordinated and applied throughout the Spanish territory when it is based on the voluntary acceptance of regional authorities, which have been assigned with the power to regulate presence-based gambling. Without doubt, the adoption of a Responsible Gaming Strategy coordinated by the sector and the State Administration will represent a huge incentive that will allow the Autonomous Regions to align with it.

3.3. The prevalence of gambling-related problems in the Spanish society

No studies on prevalence have been carried out in Spain as a whole. Partial studies have been conducted in some of the Autonomous Regions, or some specific cities. Prior to inspecting the studies, we must point out that the main difficulty resides in defining pathological gambling, since there are different levels of severity in compulsive gambling conduct as pathological gambling is a progressive disorder.

At present, most authors establish a difference between problematic gambling, which although it does not constitute a pathology, it is a problem for affected players who undergo a great feeling of guilt coupled with a high level of anxiety and a financial loss the players cannot afford, and pathological gambling, when players are unable to control their urge and cannot stop themselves from gambling, which leads to a deterioration of their personal, family and social lives, progressive isolation and a gradual distancing from reality.

Another relevant factor is the methodology used for carrying out prevalence studies. The first studies used the IGB (Inventory of Gambling Behaviour), changing later to the SOGS (South Oaks Gambling Screen), but due to the so-called "false positive rates", they generally give higher rates of addiction. Subsequent methodologies based on the criteria of DSM-III-R and, more recently, those of the NODS (NORC DSM-IV Screen for Gambling Problems), noticeably reduce prevalence levels.

Therefore, Cayuela's initial studies (1990), which used the SOGS, found 2.5% of players in Catalonia were pathological. The study carried out by EAJA (the Autonomous Body for Gambling and Betting in Spain) in 1990 found that 2.34% of the players interviewed were pathological players.

In Becoña's study (1993) on gambling addiction in seven large cities in Galicia, where a sample of 1,615 people was used, it was discovered that 1.73% of the players were pathological and 1.6% were problematic. The differences between cities were significant: for example, in Vigo, 3.48% of the players were pathological and 3.25% of the players had problems, whereas in other cities, only 0.64% of the players were pathological and 0.9 had problems. The study carried out by Lagarda, Babio and Abreu (1992), which used the SOGS to analyse gambling addiction in Seville, concluded that 1.67% of the players were probably pathological, while 5.18% of the players had problems. Irurita, using the DSM-IV methodology, concluded that there were 1.8% pathological players and 4.4% with problems. In this study, besides confirming a certain difference between the different Andalusian provinces (Cádiz, with 2.7% of pathological players headed the list, and Seville, Huelva and Málaga were above 2%). Other studies which used the SOGS (Tejeiro in Algeciras, with 1.91% of pathological players; Echeburúa, Baéz Fernandez and Páez in the Basque Country, with 2%; Becoña and Fuentes, with 1.6% in the whole of Galicia) display percentages of pathological gambling of around 2%.

The studies that use DSM-III-R or NODS display slightly lower percentages, around 1% of pathological players, and 2% of problematic players (Becoña, 2003). The group of young adults, aged between 18 and 30, display higher pathological gambling rates than groups of older people. In groups of teenagers, the percentages are up to three times higher than the levels of pathological gambling in adults.

4. The shared strategy of responsible gaming

Responsible Gaming consists in the sensible and rational selection of gaming options, taking into account the player's personal situation and circumstances, preventing gambling from turning into a problem. Responsible Gaming entails the consumers taking an informed and educated decision, with the sole purpose of seeking entertainment, distraction and when the value of the bets never exceeds the amount the individual can afford. If on any occasion there is a desire to recover the losses, it is low intensity, it is short-lasting and causes no worry, nor harms any part of the individual's life. In this respect, responsible gaming would represent a relaxing and entertaining activity. In this way, it never interferes with social, vocational or family obligations.

A **policy for responsible gaming** is the set of policies, programmes and/or practices that reduce to the maximum the possibility of people harming themselves or others, spending too much time or money on gambling, whilst minimising the impact on those who want to play without the risk of becoming gambling addicts.

As we have seen, there is general consensus that gambling is a potential risk. For this reason, the different countries in which gambling is legal have developed what they call **Responsible Gaming Strategies** that aim to minimise the damage caused by games of chance. The strategy should provide a framework in which initiatives for responsible gaming can be developed and offered in a planned and coordinated manner. It focuses on towards resolving gambling problems suffered by people, families and communities.

The approach for the strategy proposed in this document is based on public policy, which considers that gambling addiction is a complex issue that requires multiple solutions. Essentially, the approach consists in foreseeing gambling problems, as well as providing different forms of treatment and support for gambling addicts. The main aim of the Responsible Gaming Strategy in Spain is to reduce to a minimum the possible harmful effects caused by gambling addiction. This requires specific actions to make society aware of the risks of gambling, to prevent gambling-related problems and to treat their effects.

Above all, on the one hand, the Strategy should contribute to maintaining a balance between social and personal aspects and, on the other, the costs and benefits associated to games of chance in Spain.

5. Elements of the Responsible Gaming Strategy in Spain

5.1. Analysis of the current situation in Spain

The starting point for defining the strategy should be knowing and identifying the impacts of gambling addictions in Spain and the Autonomous Regions, thus making it possible to know the risks associated to each type of activity (machines, slot machines, poker, casinos...), the relationship between social gaming, gambling for money and addiction, and the effects in relation to teenagers and young people. The aim is to have a real view (not one obtained from statistical approximation) of gaming profiles (age, gender, type of activity, days of the week on which there is greater activity...).

Everybody complains about the lack of knowledge regarding the best way to prevent and treat gambling problems, mainly because of the lack of scientific understanding of the causes, nature and consequences of this phenomenon. This can only be corrected by carrying out research and knowing where to start.

This would mean that all the stakeholders, including public authorities, managers in the industry, the media, treatment and prevention professionals, other professionals and the public in general should support the study and research of games of chance.

The fact the studies were carried out a long time ago, before the advent of online gaming, as well as the variability of the studies, **justifies the need to carry out a study** to establish the current situation of problems related to gambling addiction, their extent and severity because of the type of gambling, as well as factors that influence addiction, risk factors... The exact diagnosis of the problem is fundamental for deciding which measures are the best and will least alter the development of the sector.

5.2. Target publics

Authors such as those who participate in the comprehensive review of the National Research Council (NRC, 1999) have used different terms to classify people depending on their habits and gaming patterns, adapting a conceptualisation which has become the one most commonly used in international epidemiological studies. For these experts on the subject, gambling is contemplated from a dimensional perspective; that is, as a “continuum”, with different levels or stages that reflect the degree of implication in gambling. Level 0 means that gambling does not form part of the individual's repertory of behaviours. Level 1 refers to social or recreational gambling; that is, what we call responsible gaming. Level 2 corresponds to problematic gambling. In this case, the individual displays an excessive gambling behaviour and, consequently, they can suffer problems, although their lives are not unduly affected. Level 3 is in the last position, and it is used for individuals who have lost the ability to control their gambling behaviour, thus harming or injuring all areas of their lives. From a conceptual point of view, all pathological gamblers have previously been problematic gamblers, although not all problematic gamblers will end up as pathological gamblers in the future.

Reviewing the scientific literature on the subject, it is necessary to specify that the researchers have concentrated more on analysing predisposing factors and those that maintain problematic and pathological gambling rather than strictly on social gambling (Azmir, 2000, Jang et al., 2000; McMillen et al., 2004; Wardle et al., 2007). In this way, despite the high rates of social gamblers who play in a recreational manner, very few studies have explored the benefits or risks associated to responsible gaming; therefore, there is a need to increase and improve knowledge in this area (Korn & Shaffer, 1999; Shaffer & Korn, 2002).

Therefore, who are the target publics?:

The target publics are all those people who have, or could have, gambling problems. This would imply establishing a target made up of not only problematic and/or pathological gamblers and their close families, but also those people that, without suffering problems, had a chance of developing gambling problems, although currently they do not even play.

5.3. Lines of action of the responsible gaming strategy in Spain

The strategy is based on raising public awareness, preventing and protecting vulnerable people from gambling, treating and helping those affected, and studying and researching gambling-related problems.

From the perspective of Public Authorities, the aim is to achieve a high level of protection for those addicted to gambling and risk groups, affecting those players who do not suffer from gambling problems as little as possible.

Carrying out a study all over Spain as a preliminary phase, to be able to determine the extent of the problem, the severity of the situation and its possible determining factors seems justified.

The approach for the actions related to the Responsible Gaming Strategy should include several areas of work:

Objective 1: Awareness: warning the whole community about the danger of gambling, and making everybody aware of the risks of gambling. It is important to emphasise the importance of these warnings.

Objective 2: Prevention: operators implementing active responsible gaming policies, focussing on minimising risks and maximising the protection offered by operating companies to players who form part of risk groups.

Objective 3: Support for affected people: through support plans (telephone help lines, associations...), and a network of medical centres that offer multidisciplinary treatment for gambling addictions, etc.

Objectives	Strategies
Objective 1: Raise public awareness of the risks associated to games of chance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase public knowledge of gambling and its potential problems. • Inform citizens about responsible gaming and how to make responsible choices.
Objective 2: Operators should actively promote responsible gaming and ensure players make knowledgeable choices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform players about the risks associated to games of chance, setting limits. • Ensure effective policies that promote responsible gaming. • Improve skills and knowledge of responsible gaming among the staff employed by games of chance operators.
Objective 3: Give support and advice about treatment to those people who suffer gambling-related problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuously improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the help given to individuals who suffer gambling-related problems. • Homogenise, increase and improve accessibility to the treatment services available throughout the country. • Evaluate clinical results and improve research work focussed on new therapies.

ACTIONS TO BE CARRIED OUT:

a) Immediately:

1. Draw up a study that determines the starting point of the gambling addiction problem, risk factors, factors that promote addiction and relevant information regarding the phenomenon.
2. Create a website that offers gambling addicts support and advice.
3. Provide a telephone helpline that offers affected people help and advice

All the foregoing actions will be supervised and controlled by the CAJR.

b) Medium term:

Although these actions should previously be seriously considered by the CAJR, it is possible to proceed with the following points related to each one of the previously mentioned aims, which will be subject to the CAJR's posterior approval:

Objective 1: Raise public awareness of the risks associated to games of chance		
Area of activity	Target public	Responsible
General campaign for awareness	The population as a whole	CAJR, Gambling Industry and Associations.
Creation, production and distribution of material to raise awareness	The population as a whole	CAJR, Gambling Industry and Associations.
Promote the use of the material among parents and educators	Educators Parents	Associations, DGOJ, Gambling Industry.
Development of specific activities for high risk populations	Problematic and pathological players	DGOJ, PND, Associations.

Objective 2: Operators must promote responsible gaming and ensure the players make a knowledgeable choice		
Area of activity	Target public	Responsible
Provide self-exclusion options for those who are undergoing gambling difficulties	Players	Operators DGOJ
Include responsible gaming features in gambling terminals and websites	Players	Gambling operators DGOJ (supervision)
Improve knowledge of the characteristics of responsible gaming among workers in the sector	Workers in the sector of Gambling	Operators
Develop a code of good practices to be set in motion by the operators	Operators Workers in the sector	Operators, CARJ, DGOJ

Objective 3: Give support and treatment to those who suffer gambling-related problems		
Area of activity	Target public	Responsible
Provide access to counselling services and other social services	Players	Associations, Sector, Healthcare Network
Provide treatment and advice to players with problems	Pathological players	Healthcare Network
Improve training and practice of the professionals dedicated to offering treatment	Therapists,	Healthcare Network, National Plan on Drugs

5.4. The execution of the Responsible Gaming Strategy in Spain

To define and execute the responsible gaming strategy, the following plan is proposed:

- Create an instrument for executing Responsible Gaming, that with the participation of all the companies involved in games of chance in Spain will enable to carry out the activities of the agreed strategy.
- Create a financial mechanism to channel the contributions from the sector directed towards financing the activities associated to the agreed responsible gaming strategy.

There are multiple approaches for creating these mechanisms, spanning options without any kind of management structure (where the members take it in turns to perform the functions of the Administrative Office, or management body), to options with a minimal structure, maybe shared

Translated