

Gambling addiction

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Finns gamble a lot. There are an estimated 130,000 Finns who have some sort of gambling problem. Gambling addiction is a functional disorder that is difficult to recognise because many gamblers try to keep their problem a secret.

The effects of gambling can be extremely serious and may manifest themselves as mental, physical, social and financial problems – all of which need to be addressed in treatment. If gambling addiction is accompanied by other problems such as depression or substance misuse, this creates significant challenges for organisations to identify them and to help their client holistically.

Three quarters of all Finns have gambled in some form over the past five years. For most gamblers, these games represent enjoyment, a way to pass the time and even a hobby. They seek excitement and risk in their lives through gambling. Another important reason for gambling is that it is a way of socialising and passing the time. And people gamble for the money, dreaming of getting rich. Gambling can also be a way of escaping the cares and troubles or worries of everyday life. And some people use gambling as a way of controlling our emotions in this way. But within this pastime of gambling lurks a significant risk of it turning into a problem.

130,000 Finns have a gambling problem

Sometimes our gambling can get out of control. Excessive gambling starts to create hazards and problems. It no longer provides excitement, good company or even money. The gambler becomes ashamed of his gambling and wants to conceal his problems, usually refusing to admit the problems caused by gambling. Problem gamblers feel anxiety, shame and guilt, and gambling can start to feel like an addiction. When gambling gets out of control, it can result in financial problems, conflicts with friends and family and often leads to negligence towards work, studies or other matters. There are around 130,000 Finns with some sort of gambling problem.

| Level of gambling problem (past 12 months) | Proportion of population | |
|---|--------------------------|------|
| | No. | % |
| All; Finns aged 15-74 | | |
| SOGS-R 3-4 (problems keeping gambling under control/problem gamblers) | 88,000 | 2.1% |
| SOGS-R 5+ (Probable gambling addicts) | 42,000 | 1.0% |
| Youths; Finns aged 12-17 | | |
| SOGS-RA 2-3 (Risk area) | 22,000 | 5% |
| SOGS-RA 4+ (Problem gamblers or probable gambling addicts) | 9,000 | 2.3% |
| | | |

Table: Prevalence of gambling problems in Finland

‘Problem gambling’ refers to excessive gambling that has a negative impact on other aspects of a person’s life, such as his mental or physical health, performance at school or work, finances and/or personal relationships. It can be considered as a less severe type of gambling addiction.

Gambling addiction is classified as a behavioural or impulse disorder in psychiatry, and it is a behavioural dependency. Addicts are hooked on the activity, i.e. gambling, and the feelings it produces. There are two systems of criteria used to

diagnose gambling addiction: the World Health Organization's ICD-10, which is used in Finland, and the DSM-IV (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual) from America. Most tests conducted by researchers to discover the prevalence of gambling addiction are based on the DSM-IV.

It is not easy to recognise gambling addiction

It is not easy to recognise gambling addiction, because it cannot be seen from the outside. Only things like financial problems can give others a clue.

* Have you ever felt the need to use more and more money for gambling?

* Have you ever lied to your friends or family about how much you gamble?

If you answered "yes" to either of these questions, you probably have some sort of gambling problem. It's a good idea to investigate your own situation a bit further. You can test how well you manage your gambling with the [Addictionlink gambling addiction test](#).

In many cases it's enough just to acknowledge the problem and start to pay more attention to your actions. It's a good idea to sit down and think about the pros and cons of your gambling and just write them down. A good friend can help you to do this. Together you can discuss whether your gambling has got out of hand. Have you got any misconceptions or wrong impressions about gambling and games of chance? Do you think you can fix your financial problems by gambling? You can find some tips on managing your gambling problem from places like [Peluri, the gambling helpline](#).

Instead of gambling, seek out other activities and people who don't gamble. Many gambling activities are based on random chance, and the odds are stacked against the player. It's no use trying your luck. If gambling has already taken over from your other hobbies and started to govern your life, it's time to stop and seek help.

Seeking help for gambling addictions

If you feel as if you can't control your gambling addiction on your own, seek help. Professional help is available from places like [A-Clinics](#) and mental health centres. Both are experienced at dealing with various types of addictions.

Support from people who are in the same situation is valuable and can help you to deal with your problem. There are peer-help groups for people with gambling problems in Finland. You can find out about meetings and activities from the [Peluri website](#) and the Gamblers Anonymous (GA) [website](#).

What if you can't find any help? Call Peluri. Peluri is a telephone helpline for problem gamblers and their friends and families. It is available weekdays from 12 to 6 p.m. on 0800 100 101. Calls are anonymous and free from anywhere in Finland. Peluri offers immediate support for gambling problems. [Peluri's website](#) contains information and materials on gambling addiction, tips for keeping your gambling under control, and addresses for help. [The 'Peli Poikki' self-help guide](#) provides an eight-week, web-supported therapy programme for problem gamblers. You can also ask questions about gambling addictions on Peluri's [e-advice service](#). Peluri's services are provided by the Finnish Blue Ribbon organisation and the A-Clinic Foundation.

The Social Pedagogy Foundation currently has two gambling-related projects under way: the [Pelirajat'on](#) peer group for gamblers and the Game Control project for young immigrants. You can discuss anything related to gambling problems on Addictionlink's [Valtti discussion forum](#). Treatment programmes for gambling addiction have also been developed. Programmes are available at places including the [A-Clinic in Kouvola](#) and the [Addiction Hospital](#).

Help for financial problems is available from the [Takuu Foundation](#), a national foundation for financial and debt advice. Its Omille Jaloille project and its peer-based financial advice can help you regain control of your own finances.

[The Problem Gambling page](#) on the National Institute for Health and Welfare website contains materials on prevention and control of gambling problems. The site is aimed at professionals working with gambling addiction treatment as well as policymakers, journalists, educators, students and others interested in finding information on gambling.

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