



Tackling
Gambling
Stigma

TGS Launch Presentation

Thank you all again for joining us here today.

While all of the content and stories on the website are worth going over in detail, I wanted today to highlight some of the key findings from our research. Specifically, the harm caused by stigma, the uniqueness and simultaneous similarity gambling addiction has with other addictions, and the notion we often hear of the need to protect and regulate for the vulnerable. More on that later.

Stigma

As it is the topic of the day, I wanted to start with Stigma. Greedy, lazy, untrustworthy and to blame for all their faults. These are some of the messages the people we spoke to had heard so often that in the end they started internalising them.

If there is one thing we want you to take away from today, it is that stigma kills.

Not only because it stops people from speaking up, seeking help and reaching out before it is too late. Although it absolutely does that. Stigma causes immeasurable levels of harm because it leads to discrimination. We often talk about how stigma affects the individual. Today, in this room, I wanted to highlight that stigma leads to discrimination, which in turn we see in public policy, regulation and lack of parity of esteem with other similar issues.

The people we interviewed could not understand why gambling was not treated in government policy like other addictive and harmful activities, such as alcohol, smoking and drugs.

There are much fewer restrictions on gambling and not the same level of education, public awareness, or treatment. There are no provisions in the criminal justice system, social care, or benefits as with other addictions. And it is not recognised as an issue in financial services, like other consumer vulnerabilities.

These are all symptoms and signs of stigma leading to discrimination and the effect it has on a population scale. Less treatment, less protections and less apparent value to those who suffer. A system that perpetuates the stigma because it is built on it. It fails to protect these people, because it thinks they are less worthy of their protection. If you want to see a tangible example of this, look no further than the failure to publish the whitepaper.

What if, instead, public policy said that these products are harmful and addictive. If they are to be sold there needs to be a duty of care and if someone experiences harm then we need to have a

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system in place to take care of them and those affected. I would like to put to you all, what do you think that would do to self-view of the person experiencing harm?

The addiction of gambling

Next I wanted to talk briefly about the addiction of gambling. Gambling addiction is physically and psychologically addictive just like substances. It changed the reward circuits of the people we interviewed and created overwhelming urges and intrusive thoughts. They would often talk to us about having no control, being a passenger and watching their own behaviour but being unable to stop. Yet people carried on gambling as it became the only thing they had, or to escape the harm gambling was causing or as a form of self-punishment.

In other ways gambling addiction is unique. Money being one of those areas. Because people DO win money, but unpredictably. Engaging in the addictive activity is seen as a way, and often the only, to escape the harm caused by the addiction.

Another way that gambling is different is that there are no bodily signs or limits to stop the harm from happening very fast and continuing for a long time without being noticed. There is a physical limit to how much alcohol, cigarettes or drugs that can be consumed. Gambling does not have this. It is limited only by money, time, and opportunity to gamble.

Everyone is vulnerable

Lastly, one thing became overwhelmingly clear in our interviews. Everyone is vulnerable.

What we mean by that is, Gambling is addictive. Shocking I know. To the people in this room this is nothing new. But I want us to look closer at what this means.

Gambling products are addictive by design. So why do we not treat them as such? We here all know that alcohol is harmful. Most of us probably don't mind a glass of wine with friends. But we all know, that in higher quantities it causes drunkenness, stupor, unconsciousness or even death. Long-term use can lead alcohol addiction, an increased risk of developing several types of cancer and cardiovascular disease. We and the general public knows this.

So let me say this again. Gambling is addictive. Some people may have underlying issues that makes them "vulnerable" to the addictive effects of gambling. But gambling itself is addictive and we are all vulnerable. What we need is to move away from trying to protect a small group of people by labelling them vulnerable – in effect saying that they are the weak ones who couldn't gamble "responsibly" – and regulate gambling as the addictive and harmful products they are.



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Before we hand over to our other speakers, we wanted to showcase the resource we have developed and let you listen to some of their stories. Before we do, I wanted to give a warning due to the nature of the content we are about to listen to, as it includes references to suicidality which may be distressing.

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