

Gambling in Prisons – A Nationwide Polish Study of Sentenced Men

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Abstract

Despite the abandonment of the criterion of committing illegal acts in the diagnosis of pathological gambling in fifth edition of *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-V), research confirms the significant link between crime, gambling, and gambling addiction. In Poland, this connection is observed by psychologists working in the prison service, who simultaneously report the need for more structured interactions that would solve gambling problems among prisoners. The lack of any data on the involvement of persons committing crimes in gambling in Poland formed the basis for the implementation of a survey of gambling behaviour and gambling problems among male offenders in Polish correctional institutions. A total of 1,219 sentenced men took part in the study. The research tool included 75 questions, including queries from the South Oaks Gambling Screen (SOGS). Based on SOGS, the prevalence rate of severe problem gambling was 29.4% over the lifetimes of the prisoners. As many as 13.1% of respondents admitted to having gambled in prison. This activity usually involved cards, bets or dice. More than 74% of incarcerated men who gambled in prison met the criteria for pathological gambling. Prisoners who gambled more in prison than at liberty made up 27.7%. As many as 69.3% of respondents declared that while in prison, they had met fellow convicts experiencing problems because of gambling. The study shows that criminals continue gambling after detention, especially those who are problem gamblers, an overall finding which implies the need to implement preventive and therapeutic interventions in correctional institutions.

Keywords: problem gambling, illegal, crime, prevalence, incarceration

Résumé

Malgré l'abandon du critère d'actes illégaux dans le diagnostic du jeu pathologique, dans la cinquième édition du *Manuel diagnostique et statistique des troubles mentaux*

(DSM-V), la recherche confirme le lien important entre criminalité, jeu et dépendance. En Pologne, ce lien est observé par des psychologues travaillant dans le service pénitentiaire, signalant en même temps le besoin d'interactions plus structurées qui résoudraient les problèmes de jeu chez les détenus. L'absence de données sur la participation de personnes commettant des délits aux jeux d'argent en Pologne a servi de base à la mise en œuvre d'une enquête sur les comportements et les problèmes de jeu chez les délinquants de sexe masculin dans les établissements correctionnels polonais. Au total, 1 219 prisonniers ont participé à l'étude. L'outil de recherche comprenait 75 questions, dont des questions tirées du South Oaks Gambling Screen (SOGS). Selon le SOGS, le taux de prévalence du jeu problématique sévère était de 29,4 % au cours de la vie des détenus. Jusqu'à 13,1 % des répondants ont reconnu avoir joué en prison. Les jeux comprenaient généralement des cartes, des paris ou des dés. Plus de 74 % des hommes incarcérés qui ont joué en prison répondaient aux critères de jeu pathologique. Les détenus qui jouaient plus en prison qu'en liberté représentaient 27,7 %. Jusqu'à 69,3 % des répondants ont déclaré qu'en prison, ils ont rencontré des personnes éprouvant des problèmes de jeu. L'étude montre que les criminels continuent de jouer après la détention, en particulier ceux qui sont des joueurs compulsifs, ce qui laisse entrevoir la nécessité de mettre en œuvre des interventions préventives et thérapeutiques dans les établissements correctionnels.

Introduction

The relationship between criminal activity and gambling has attracted academic interest for several decades. Until 2012, involvement in any illegal activity to obtain money for gambling purposes constituted one of the DSM-IV-TR criteria for diagnosing pathological gambling: "8. Has committed illegal acts such as forgery, fraud, theft, or embezzlement to finance gambling" (APA, 2000). Even though the American Psychiatric Association abandoned this criterion in 2013, scholars worldwide have nevertheless provided evidence that confirms the relationship between gambling and criminal activity (Adolphe, Khatib, van Golde, Gainsbury, & Blaszczyński, 2019; Bellringer et al., 2009; Campbell & Marshall, 2007; Lahn, 2005; Laursen, Plauborg, Ekholm, Larsen, & Juel, 2015; Williams, Royston, & Hagen, 2005). As a result of this connection, inmates reside in penal institutions who have gambled for various periods of time, as do those prisoners who are addicted to gambling (Lind, Salonen, Järvinen-Tassopoulos, Alho, & Castrén, 2019; May-Chahal, Wilson, Humphreys, & Anderson, 2012; Turner, Preston, McAvoy, & Gillam, 2013; Zorland, Mooss, & Perkins, 2008; Zurhold, Verthein, Kalke, 2013). Williams and his colleagues (2005a) found that, compared to all other groups of persons (general population and people addicted to substances), prison populations enjoyed the highest proportion of pathological and problem gamblers. Riley and Oakes have confirmed this finding (2014). The review of Banks and his colleagues

shows that rate of problem or pathological gambling in prison populations ranges from 5.9% to 73% of inmates, depending on the country (Banks, Waters, Andersson, & Olive, 2019).

One of the declared basic responsibilities of the Prison Service in Poland is “to carry out correctional and rehabilitation-oriented interventions in relation to imprisoned persons, especially by providing them with work opportunities to help them acquire professional qualifications; education, cultural and educational activities, physical culture and sport activities, and specialist therapeutic interventions” (Prison Service Act, 2010, Chapter 1, Art.2.2.). This task has been executed, for example, through a substance addiction treatment programme, in operation throughout the Polish prison system for nearly 25 years (Regulation of the Minister of Justice of 14 August 2003 on procedures for correctional interventions in correctional facilities and police custodies). The relationship between gambling and criminal activity suggests the need for closed institutions to introduce systematic prevention and treatment measures. In Poland, no systematic measures have been taken so far, with one exception. The only measure that could be regarded as a form of systematic prevention is the ban on gambling in closed institutions, included in the *Guide for detained, convicted, fined and foreigners* (Guide, 2017).

Gambling remains a popular form of entertainment while incarcerated (Abbott, McKenna, & Giles, 2005; Beauregard & Brochu, 2013a; Lahn & Grabosky, 2003; McEvoy & Spirgen, 2012; Turner et al., 2013; Williams et al., 2005a). In prison, gambling takes various forms, depending on the practicability of organizing them in confinement.

In their literature review, Williams and his colleagues (2005a) found that gambling was reported by approximately 46% of inmates and usually involved betting on anything. Many studies conducted in Australia indicate that 60% of inmates engage in games for money, including betting on the results of matches watched on television (Lahn & Grabosky, 2003). In New Zealand, the involvement of inmates in gambling has been reported to be 26%, and usually involves playing card games for money (Abbott et al., 2005). In Canada, this figure has been reported to be 44%, with playing cards for money and betting being the most popular forms of gambling (Turner et al., 2013). Studies in the United States have found the involvement of inmates in gambling activities to operate at approximately 40% of incarcerated persons (Williams, 2009).

Individual games vary in terms of their popularity, with certain scholars arguing that sports betting is the most popular (Beauregard & Brochu, 2013a; McEvoy & Spirgen, 2012), while others, such as Turner and colleagues (2013), suggest that it is cards. According to Williams (2009), inmates engage in various forms of gambling (card games, bingo, sports betting, and betting on occurrences within prisons, such as the sports performance of other prisoners). Scholars have recorded the seemingly limitless creativity on the part of inmates when it comes to inventing various forms of games for money; virtually any activity whose outcome can be predicted becomes the

subject of a bet, and even Monopoly, dominoes, and chess can and have become gambling games (Beauregard & Brochu, 2013a).

Inmates derive certain benefits from their involvement in gambling in prison. Generally, these benefits include tangible goods, such as money, cigarettes, tobacco, commissary items, and food (Beauregard & Brochu, 2013a; Williams, 2009). Other goods that prisoners bet on are specific tasks or sexual favours (Williams, 2009). However, apart from tangible benefits, gambling has mainly recreational value for inmates. It is treated as a form of entertainment that provides them with a sense of freedom, fun, and excitement (Williams, 2008). Inmates report that the lack of alternative options for spending their free time contributes to their engagement in illegal activities, including gambling, while in prison (Beauregard & Brochu, 2013a). McEvoy and Spirgen (2012) argued that gambling would be less popular if prisoners were provided with more pastime options. This claim was also supported by Aguilar and Asmussen (1989), who linked idleness and preference for passive entertainment (television) with the lack of access to active entertainment, gymnasiums, and other forms of popular activity. Interestingly enough, Frey and Delaney (1996) suggested that if inmates were provided with various activities, they tended to opt for the passive, less-engaging, and short-term activities, such as watching television or reading books, which offer intensive and instant gratification.

Beauregard and Brochu (2013a) wrote that gambling in prison was popular because it was cheap and, consequently, relatively easily accessible, while also fairly common, which consequently reduced the risk of the inmate being punished for it. In addition, inmates have reported that guards generally give their tacit consent to gambling if it involves only small sums of money or low-value property.

So far, there have been no studies in Poland on the prevalence or character of gambling among male prisoners. The first study to estimate the severity of gambling problems among Polish prisoners was conducted in 2016, the findings of which are presented here. The purpose of this paper is to describe the involvement in gambling among men incarcerated in Polish prisons. The research addressed six questions: (1) What is the severity of gambling involvement and gambling problems among sentenced men? (2) What games are the most popular in prison? (3) Which prisoners are more likely than others to engage in gambling in prison? (4) Is gambling continued or initiated in prison? (5) Does the intensity of gambling change after being detained? Finally, (6), What factors motivate prisoners to gamble after detention? The answers for all six questions are analysed in this article.

Method

The goal of this research was to examine gambling activities among sentenced men and to link them with other determinants (including social, environmental, and family-related factors, as well as other addictions and criminal activities). This paper presents results concerning the involvement of inmates in gambling during their incarceration.

Participants

The survey studied 1,219 men (1,230 sets were distributed) who, between them, had stayed in 23 correctional facilities or seven police custodies, or were incarcerated in therapeutic units for persons addicted to alcohol (11 units) or drugs (9 units). The penal institutions included in the study were selected based on a random sampling of from a list of all penitentiary units in Poland to ensure that the study group constituted a representative sample. Systematic sampling was used, drawing every k th individual from all sentenced prisoners in the unit to find 30 participants (in non-therapeutic units) or 15 participants (in therapeutic wards) from each unit. Their average age was 34.24 years ($SD = 10.379$, $min = 18$, $max = 69$).

Measures

The research tool included 75 questions, including 14 open-ended questions and the 20 questions that composed the South Oaks Gambling Screen (Lesieur & Blume, 1987) in its 2006 version (<https://pdf4pro.com>). The questionnaire was divided into five parts: (1) sociodemographic data and legal classification within the penal system; (2) family and social backgrounds and history of addiction; (3) level of gambling (including SOGS questions); (4) links between gambling activity and illegal acts; and (5) gambling in prison and open comments. The contents of the questionnaire were based on the pre-defined research goals and a review of the literature (Bellringer et al., 2009). Since the amount of data collected was substantial, this article only presents the results of the analysis of Part 5 of the questionnaire.

Part 5 included eight questions. To minimize the risk of false answers being provided by respondents, I did not permit the first two questions to refer directly to the participants' involvement in gambling, and instead asked whether they had in fact heard of prison gambling. Only the third and four following questions concerned their own involvement in the activity. The seventh question concerned the contacts of inmates with other inmates who maintained gambling problems. The last question was open-ended and concerned the prisoners' own respective comments and remarks about gambling in prison. The answers of inmates were categorized independently by two members of the research team and then verified together. The first large group of statements concerned the damage arising from gambling, the second group of statements was related to the benefits of gambling and the motivation to practice it, and the third group of statements was neutral. The statements from each of the three groups were then grouped into more specific categories that were consistent in their content. Finally, eight categories of responses were created (three evaluated gambling negatively, three were neutral, and two were positive).

To estimate the severity of gambling problems among prisoners the author used the Polish adaptation of the South Oaks Gambling Screen (SOGS), as developed by Lesieur and Blume (1987), in its 2006 version. This instrument had been used previously in another Polish research study about gambling, so the results of this

study can be compared with the previous study. The maximum possible score in the questionnaire was 20 points. A score of zero meant no symptoms of problem gambling; 1–4 points corresponded to a low severity of problem gambling; and 5 or more points indicated likely pathological gambling. In the article, persons with 5 or more points are described as pathological gamblers. The lifetime reference period was used because of the specific nature of the sample (the possibility of being in prison for more than 12 months). It is common practice when dealing with such groups to base evaluations of pathological gambling on lifetime symptoms rather than symptoms over the preceding 12 months (Algren, Ekholm, Davidsen, Larsen, & Juel, 2014; Laursen et al., 2015).

Procedure

The research was conducted from July to October 2016. It was preceded by a pilot study among 30 convicted men, aimed at refining the questionnaire and adapting the language to the respondents' abilities. Respondents completed the survey in groups (up to 15 persons) under conditions that ensured their anonymity (e.g., in a day room), without Prison Service officers present. To minimize the risk of false answers being provided by respondents for fear of suffering the consequences of admitting to certain prohibited acts, interviewers were persons who did not work for the Prison Service. Interviewers provided respondents with pens and assured them of the anonymity of survey results. After they had completed the survey, respondents put them into envelopes, sealed them, and returned them to the interviewers.

Statistical analyses

Statistical analyses were performed using SPSS v.24 software (IBM Corporation, 2016). Data for individual groups were described on the basis of frequency and percentages. To compare data between groups, I performed a chi-squared test and standardized residuals (*e*) analysis. Continuous data are presented as means (*M*), standard deviations (*SD*), minima (*min*), and maxima (*max*). Continuous data were compared between the groups using the Student's *t*-test, the analysis of variance and Scheffe's test for *post-hoc* comparisons.

Results

The prisoners' lifetime gambling problems were estimated from the sub-sample of respondents who answered the diagnostic questions of SOGS ($n = 891$). The data reveal the severity of such problems to be great, with as many as 29.4% ($n = 262$, 95% CI: 26.5-32.6) of inmates exhibiting symptoms of pathological gambling (5 or more points in SOGS) (Lelonek-Kuleta & Bartczuk, 2019).

Fewer than half of the respondents admitted to having heard of the possibility of gambling while in prison (41.2%), but the majority did not admit to possessing such knowledge (58.8%). The possibility of engaging in gambling while in prison was

usually acknowledged by respondents who had admitted to having gambled in their lives outside of prison (73%) and who met the criteria for pathological gambling (64.5%).

Next, inmates were asked what gambling games were played in prison, according to their knowledge (see Table 1). They usually mentioned cards (69.9%), betting and bookmaking (35.6%), and dice (32.6%). Other forms that were mentioned included cash lotteries and Lotto; ping-pong (for money); chess and dominoes (for money); board games; scratch lotteries; and billiards.

Of the sentenced men, 13.1% admitted to gambling while incarcerated. Regarding the question about awareness of the possibility of gambling in penitentiary units, this matter was also acknowledged by the inmates who had not gambled themselves (424 persons declared they knew about gambling in such institutions and 96 respondents admitted to engaging in gambling). To address this question, the researcher performed a chi-squared and standardized residual test (see Table 2). Inmates who gambled while incarcerated had usually gambled before going to prison, while

Table 1

Forms of gambling reported as available by respondents while incarcerated (N = 568)

Gambling activity	Number (N)	% per row
Cards	397	69.9%
Dice	185	32.6%
Cash lotteries / Lotto	28	4.9%
Betting / bookmaking	202	35.6%
Dominoes	10	1.8%
Board games	5	0.9%
Scratch lotteries	1	0.2%
Ping-pong	11	1.9%
Chess	10	1.8%
Billiards	1	0.2%
“I won’t say”	7	1.2%

Table 2

Results of Chi-square test and descriptive statistics examining relationship between respondents’ experience of gambling while incarcerated and throughout life

Gambling throughout life	Gambling while in prison	
	Yes	No
Yes	66 (90.4%)	202 (54.0%)
No	7 (9.6%)	172 (46.0%)

Note. $\chi^2 = 33.707$, $df = 1$.

* $p < .001$.

Table 3

Results of Chi-square test and descriptive statistics examining relationship between respondent's involvement in gambling while incarcerated and pathological gambling problems

Pathological gambling	Gambling in prison	
	Yes	No
Yes	49 (74.2%)	93 (46.0%)
No	4 (6.1%)	43 (21.3%)

Note. Percentages do not add up to 100 because the low severity problem gambler group was excluded from the analysis; $\chi^2 = 12.886$, $df = 2$.
* $p < .001$.

inmates who did not gamble while in prison generally had not had any previous gambling experience ($e = 5.8$).

Another question was which gamblers continued to gamble while in prison. This question was asked to assess the severity of their gambling problems. Results of this study (Table 3) indicate that inmates who gambled while in prison generally were most likely to be pathological gamblers ($e = 4.0$). Persons who did not have gambling problems were less likely to engage in gambling while incarcerated ($e = 2.8$).

Inmates were also asked how their gambling intensity changed in prison compared to gambling outside prison. Respondents' answers revealed that 63.6% of them gambled less frequently in prison than outside prison. However, more than one in four (27.7%) reported that their gambling intensity actually increased while incarcerated.

When it came to the popularity of playing games for money, to which inmates themselves did admit, respondents usually mentioned cards (67.3%), betting (including sports bets) (29.5%), and dice (21.2%). Other forms of gambling that were reported included Lotto and, all for money, chess, table tennis, and dominoes.

Another issue concerned why sentenced men engaged in gambling. Motivations behind involvement in gambling, as reported by respondents, included tangible benefits (54.2%), killing time/relieving boredom (27.9%), desire to experience competition and adrenaline (18.4%), and need for entertainment (17.4%). In addition, individual respondents mentioned addiction and the associated compulsion to play, as well as pressure from other inmates.

Next, the inmates were asked about their contact with other inmates who had gambling problems. As many as 69.3% of all respondents confirmed that during their stay in a penitentiary unit, they had met convicts who used to have or had problems because of playing slot machines or engaging in other forms of gambling. Multiple comparisons showed that problem gamblers were significantly more likely to be met by persons who were gamblers themselves (see Table 4). In addition, interactions

Table 4

Results of Chi-square Test and Descriptive Statistics examining relationship between contact with problem gamblers while incarcerated and gambling behaviour

Gambling	Contact with problem gamblers while incarcerated	
	Yes	No
Yes	342 (69.7%)	126 (54.5%)
No	149 (30.3%)	105 (45.5%)

Note. $\chi^2 = 15.725$, $df = 1$.

* $p < .001$.

Table 5

Comments related to gambling made by respondents while incarcerated (N= 351)

Gambling Comment	Number	% of N per row
It is dangerous, causes problems, and needs to be avoided	114	32.5%
It is a disorder, an addiction	25	7.1%
It is positive if used in moderation	37	10.5%
It is senseless and stupid	67	19.1%
Persons engage in it because they are bored and have nothing else to do	61	17.4%
It is, has been, and will be common and widespread	16	4.6%
It is a way to make some money	10	2.8%
I haven't heard of it and I'm not interested in it	46	13.1%

with problem gamblers were also much more frequently reported by inmates who themselves met the criteria for pathological gambling ($e = 4$).

Finally, respondents were asked to offer their own comments and remarks concerning gambling in closed institutions. A quantitative content analysis was used to analyse open ended questions. In the first stage of the analysis two coders in the research team read sequentially all responses and underlined keywords and sentences. Then, each coder created initial response categories and then they compared categories seeking common ones and discussing different ones. Certain preliminary categories were expanded or joined with others. Finally the answers were categorized (see Table 5). In the total of 351 answers, the majority emphasized the negative consequences of gambling, with 32.5% of respondents suggesting that gambling should be avoided because it could cause problems and is dangerous, and 19.1% argued that gambling was senseless and stupid. Nearly one in five inmates (17.4%) claimed that persons engaged in gambling because of boredom and lack of other activities in which they could engage.

The chi-square test of independence between groups distinguished on the basis of SOGS and categories of prisoners' statements. The results showed that pathological gamblers were more likely to suggest that gambling is dangerous and should be avoided, while

inmates who admitted to having gambled in their lives but were not addicted to gambling were more likely to claim that gambling is positive if used in moderation.

Discussion and Conclusions

The presented findings describe involvement in gambling in confinement conditions among Polish prisoners. Results show that 13.1% of the inmates who provided answers admitted to gambling while in prison (96 respondents in total), and 41.2% (424 participants) declared that they had heard of such a possibility. This discrepancy may suggest that certain respondents concealed the fact that they had gambled. The possibility of engaging in gambling while in prison was more often acknowledged by inmates who had admitted to having gambled in their lives outside of prison and who met the criteria for pathological gambling. The association of pathological gambling with gambling in prison confirms Williams and colleagues' (2005a) findings.

Prison gambling research is not particularly abundant. The results of other studies show proportionally greater involvement of inmates in gambling. Williams and colleagues (2005a) have suggested that about 40% of inmates engage in gambling while incarcerated (mainly cards, bingo, or sports betting), while Turner and colleagues (2013) reported the figure to be 34% (cards or sports betting). However, researchers also note that gambling in prison is less common than it is outside (Williams et al., 2005a).

Lower acknowledgement rates of involvement in gambling among Polish inmates can be due in part to the misunderstanding of what the word *gambling* really means. In Polish, “gambling” is commonly understood as casino games, i.e., serious gambling. Other games for money, such as cash lotteries, or betting are not associated with gambling, and persons who play such games do not consider themselves gamblers. For certain persons, the word *gambler* is equivalent to the meaning of *addict* (Lelonek-Kuleta, Chuchra, & Sak, 2017). Similar findings were reported by Beauregard and Brochu (2013c), who wrote that many respondents were not aware that they had been gambling and only realized it after redefining the concept of gambling.

However, as many as 69.3% of all respondents confirmed that, during their respective stays in a penitentiary unit, they each had met fellow convicts who had social problems because of playing slot machines or who had engaging in other forms of gambling. The interactions with problem gamblers were also much more frequently reported by inmates who were gamblers themselves and who met the criteria for pathological gambling. This finding may be because of the fact that they had closer relationships within the prison gambling circles. Inmates who gamble themselves have closer contact with other players, a situation which allows them to observe and notice gambling behaviours. Williams and colleagues (2005a) also draw attention to this factor, stating that there is a significant subculture of gambling in prison.

The most popular games among prisoners are cards, betting, and dice. Certain of the games indicated by them are in fact not gambling games by definition

(dominoes, chess, billiards), but clearly inmates have introduced an element of betting to make them more exciting and, as a result, more attractive. This also supports an observation made by Beauregard and Brochu (2013a) about inmates being highly creative when it comes to inventing gambling games and betting on anything and everything. In addition, inmates mentioned games available outside prison, including Lotto and scratch lotteries, which raises questions about the access to such games. Most likely these are supplied by prisoners who work outside prison.

The majority of prisoners who engage in gambling had also done so on the outside (90.4%), so this activity started prior to their incarceration and is continued there. In view of the above fact, penal institutions in Poland rarely constitute places where persons are initiated into gambling, but they do allow persons who seek such entertainment to continue it. In addition, an overwhelming majority of prison gamblers exhibited symptoms of pathological gambling. Therefore, it can be assumed that those incarcerated persons are especially problematic or pathological gamblers who seek gambling opportunities while in prison. This situation happens despite all the limitations characteristic of prison conditions; persons who are interested in gambling are able to do so and continue high-intensity gambling. The finding is a crucial one from the prevention point of view. It is important to assess inmates in terms of their gambling problems and to provide persons at risk of developing addictions with prevention and treatment interventions. Currently, there are no systematic studies in this area in Poland. In addition, it needs to be noted that more than one in four (27.7%) respondents gambled more often in prison than outside prison, which is another argument for taking systematic measures to prevent pathological gambling in confinement conditions. In prisons, persons addicted to gambling, or at risk of becoming addicted, are provided with relatively favourable conditions to continue such activity. Beauregard and Brochu (2013b) reported that inmates adopt specific standards of behaviour, which might also include gambling. As a result, a correctional facility can be a risk environment that fosters gambling addiction among those prisoners who had gambled before being imprisoned. Williams and his colleagues confirm this by observation, writing that opportunities to gamble in prison are readily available to inmates who seek it (Williams et al., 2005a).

Benefits from gambling in prison vary, and generally are no different than those available on the outside and contribute to increased motivation for engaging in gambling. The main motivations mentioned by respondents are similar to those reported worldwide and include financial benefits, dealing with difficult emotions or experiencing desirable emotions, killing time, socialising, and relieving boredom (McEvoy & Spirgen, 2012; Williams, 2008). It is important to note that for gamblers on the outside, the first three motivations are characteristic of pathological gamblers, while the last three tend to be found among recreational gamblers (Blaszczynski & Nower, 2002; Chevalier, Geoffrion, Audet, Papineau, & Kimpton, 2005; Lelonek-Kuleta, 2012). The data collected from the study population found similar results—killing time and boredom were usually cited by non-addicts and least frequently by pathological gamblers, while financial benefits was the reason most often reported by

probable pathological gamblers. Inmates reported boredom and having nothing else to do as reasons for gambling. Prevention measures should include an organized support system for problem gamblers within the penal system.

Scholars have emphasized that boredom encourages involvement in gambling because gambling introduces excitement into the mundane reality of prison confinement (Beauregard & Brochu, 2013c). Williams and colleagues (2005b) have suggested that such illegal behaviour be counteracted by providing alternative activities that address the needs of inmates, such as the need for excitement or adrenaline rush from time to time.

The most popular games played for money in prison conditions were cards, betting/bookmaking, and dice, all of which have been repeatedly reported in international studies (McEvoy & Spirgen, 2012; Turner et al., 2013). However, certain studies have suggested that prisoners were, relative to other forms of gambling, less likely to play cards, since card games required more time and physical space (Beauregard & Brochu, 2013c). Perhaps these differences are cultural in nature. It can also be assumed that the preferred types of games are linked to the mode in which the time is being served and the type of correctional facility in which it is being served (in low-security prisons, access to cards is much easier). Betting on tangible goods is also common in prison conditions. Financial problems with organizing games have been reported by other scholars. Beauregard and Brochu (2013a) wrote about the popularity of bookmaking and its organization in prison, which is sometimes given up by inmates because of insolvency issues. However, small-scale betting is a relatively popular form of entertainment. Respondents reported that the subject of a bet can be a ping-pong game, a video game, a game of billiards or chess, or the occurrence of a specific event. The prison environment can impose certain restrictions on access to games for money, but it does not make such games impossible. Beauregard and Brochu (2013a) mentioned four such restrictions, namely no access to video games, unfavourable playing conditions (especially for table and card games), limited funds, and the length of time of imprisonment and the time left to be imprisoned.

Ten per cent of inmates suggested that gambling could be positive if it is used in moderation. Overall, the answers showed that the majority of respondents believed gambling to be something negative and linked it to negative consequences (or at least they declared so). A study by May-Chahal and colleagues (2012) indicated an equal distribution of negative and positive attitudes towards gambling among inmates.

This study was quantitative in nature and explored many aspects related to gambling from the perspective of incarcerated men. The paper presented certain specific results concerning gambling in confinement conditions. Whereas many studies on the relationships between criminal activity and gambling have been published, there is nevertheless much less data on prison gambling. The study provided many important findings about this phenomenon. Firstly, it is crucial to note how widespread gambling in confinement is despite the fact that it is forbidden.

Moreover, a significant majority of persons who seek gambling in prison had started gambling on the outside and display symptoms of gambling problems. Therefore, while Polish prison conditions do not seem to restrict access to gambling, they do not provide any organized support for pathological gamblers like other countries (Nixon, Leigh, & Nowatzki, 2006) but only individual measures within specific penal institutions. Finally, research confirms the high involvement of criminals in gambling activities and the pursuit of it also after detention, despite their perception of the negative consequences of gambling. These results suggest that a significant proportion of prisoners need support in connection with gambling, which is often the reason for their detention (Lelonek-Kuleta & Bartczuk, 2019). Gambling disorder in criminal jurisprudence should be treated analogously to alcohol addiction in terms of impact on a person's behaviour, a finding also reported by Adolphe, van Golde and Blaszczyński (2019). Convicts shown to be maintaining a link between gambling disorder and crime could be referred for treatment, so that detention would be a chance for them to cope with the problem, not to maintain it.

Study Limitations

The study contained certain limitations. In Poland, low-, medium- and high-security prisons operate in one penitentiary unit. Hence, persons from all types of wards were selected for research. The questionnaire asked about the type of unit; however, because of the significant lack of data, the answers cannot be included in the analyses. Perhaps prisoners did not always distinguish between the respective types of prison they are in, which would explain the missing data. Studies were conducted for four months. Because of the anonymous nature of the research, the risk that the same inmates would be sampled more than once was always present. At 75 questions, the survey was long, which could be difficult for prisoners because of their low rates of literacy. However, to adapt the language to the capabilities of the convicts, pilot studies were conducted in a group of 30 prisoners.

This was the first study on the prevalence of prisoner gambling in Poland, so we decided to start by examining men as a more accessible group to discover if there are any consistencies regarding this phenomenon in Polish prisons. Future studies of women in this context seem highly desirable and will certainly be undertaken, as pointed out by researchers (Turner et al., 2013).

Open-question analysis I based on only 351 answers, a number which restricts the robustness of the results accordingly. The limited quantity of answers may have been an indirect product of the low literacy rates of inmates, and may suggest the need to construct more effective research tools for research on prisoners.

Because of its survey character, this study did not provide an in-depth overview of certain aspects. To explore this phenomenon in more detail, the author has undertaken a qualitative study, i.e., on prison gambling, co-financed by the Polish Ministry of Health, whose results are currently under development and which are set to be published once their analysis is complete.

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