

Ethical Gambling: a commitment to preventing gambling addiction from the political and social standpoints

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Although the clinical and diagnostic criteria of pathological gambling are practically the same from DSM-III-R to DSM-5, what is truly new in the latest edition of the APA's Manual is that pathological gambling is now included in the same category as other addictions: drug dependency, alcoholism and tobacco addiction. This categorization has been an historical claim in medical, social and scientific fields (Petry, 2002; Potenza, 2002). The American Psychiatric Association itself acknowledges that the diagnostic criteria of pathological gambling of DSM-III-R (APA, 1987) were added not only to provide a more complete description of the disorder, but to emphasize their similarity to the essential characteristics of psychoactive substances.

Today, gambling in Spain has expanded enormously in the economic and social spheres. This is mainly due to two factors. On one hand, the penetration of Communica-

tion and Information Technologies (especially Internet and mobile phones) in gambling has caused both an increase in the contents that were not previously subject to betting, and the spread of such games, making these more available and accessible. Apart from this, since the 13/2011 Act on "Regulation of Gambling", online gambling has been authorized in Spain and the supply of games of chance has risen enormously, along with the advertisements and marketing techniques for the majority of these.

This has had two main consequences. Firstly, the increase in spending on gambling online by part of the Spanish people, as expenditure on online gambling has surpassed spending at bingo halls, casinos, or the majority of lotteries (DGOJ, 2014). Secondly, the increase of pathological gamblers affected by online gambling, which is already the second cause of addiction for gamblers undergoing recovery in Spain. This is particularly significant, not only

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because the problem of addiction to online gambling has appeared more quickly than occurs in other types of games, but also because it is especially affecting young people, who are more vulnerable to online gambling, due to the use of new technologies

The negative consequences of gambling, as a potentially addictive factor, are well known for the authorities and stakeholders. Concepts such as Corporate Social Responsibility, or Responsible Gambling (Blaszczynski, Collins, Fong, Ladouceur et al., 2011) indicate that gambling activity can be potentially harmful for some players. Responsible Gambling also assumes that both governments and companies can do something for the purpose of mitigating the problems caused by gambling, or to promote healthy behaviors preventing pathological gambling. Hence, the Advisory Council of Responsible Gambling was created in Spain in 2013. This body includes representatives of the Government, civil society (clinicians, scientists and pathological gamblers) and gambling companies. But, in spite of the debates and reports presented (Chóliz, 2013a, 2013b), the Spanish Government has not until now carried out any really effective measures for preventing gambling addiction.

For all these reasons, a step forward needs to be taken in order to obtain a commitment from society in the prevention of gambling addiction. That is why the coining of a new concept is proposed: "Ethical Gambling".

"Ethical Gambling" goes beyond Responsible Gambling, through the Government and companies assuming responsibility not only for the genesis of the disorder, but also for the

prevention of addiction. In fact, **gambling policies** are the **most effective forms for the prevention of addiction** (Chóliz, 2014; Chóliz & Mazón, 2012; Williams, West and Simpson, 2012). Furthermore, in a State under the Rule of Law, the agents responsible for a social problem should be involved in its solution.

Ethical Gambling is based on the following principles.

1. From an socioeconomic standpoint:
 - a. Gambling is a daunting economic activity (Mazón & Chóliz, 2012). In the case of Spain, 28.1 billion euros were spent in 2013 (DGOJ, 2014), which represents about 2% of our GDP. This is a very profitable economic activity for those who manage the game, since the profits are directly related to the amount of money that is gambled.
 - b. The economic profits of the companies that manage the game come directly from the gamblers' losses, which are greater the more money is bet, because the mathematical expectation is always favourable to the companies that manage the game. Gambling is an economic activity, in which the business does not produce a value-added product, but where the profits obtained by those who manage the business instead come from what the gamblers have lost.
2. From a psychological perspective:
 - a. Gambling is a potentially addictive activity, since: a) it activates the same brain reward circuits as drugs; and b) the clinical symptoms of pathological gambling are the same as those of drug addictions



(American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

b. Pathological gambling is a serious mental disorder (Grant & Potenza, 2004; Petry, 2012), whose clinical and diagnostic criteria (the need to gamble with larger and larger sums of money; restlessness or irritability when attempting to stop gambling; repeated unsuccessful efforts to control, cut back or stop gambling; returning to gambling after losing money, etc.) lead to a pattern of excessive gambling and increasingly serious losses.

Pathological gamblers continue to play in spite of the awareness that doing so will seriously harm them and their families. Information about the negative effects of this pattern of excessive gambling is not enough to make them stop. Gambling addicts are not free to stop playing, given that the illness has made them dependent on the game, just as occurs with drug, tobacco or alcohol addicts (American Psychiatric Association, 1987).

Based on these principles, and on the current conditions in which gambling is done in Spain, we can affirm that this is a historic point in time and setting in which patterns of excessive gambling are being induced, especially since the legalization of online gambling. Clearly, in these circumstances, it is not enough to give information about the negative consequences of pathological gambling, nor even to indicate what they have to do to overcome or prevent it. Responsible Gambling has not been effective in this new historical and social context and a step further needs to be taken. This involves assuming the responsibility of both the Administration and the gambling companies in the genesis of this disorder, and

implementing gambling policies based on the principles of "Ethical Gambling", which are based on **preventing excessive losses of players**.

"Ethical Gambling" is thus a societal commitment to the health of its citizens, in order to prevent the onset of gambling addiction and to promote the rehabilitation of pathological gamblers. It requires the establishment of gambling policies to be carried out by the Government, by means of which the economic activity is permitted, but the appearance of gambling addiction is prevented. To achieve this goal there is no other solution than to regulate the activity so that the **excessive loss of money by players is prevented**, because this is the main cause of pathological gambling.

"Ethical Gambling" recognizes and accepts that, by limiting gamblers' losses, the companies' profits are also reduced. Given that there is a conflict of rights between the maximum economic profits and the prevention of disease, however, a modern society must protect citizens' health.

The way to implement gambling policies based on "Ethical Gambling" principles must be based on scientific criteria. The behavioral sciences not only give us a convincing explanation for the emergence and maintenance of gambling addiction, but must also provide the necessary techniques and tools of prevention.

Ethical Gambling, in short, consists in the regulation of gambling in order to effectively prevent gambling addiction by applying scientifically proven psychological techniques. The authorities are the ones who should enable the compatibility of economic interests with the



citizens' right to health, which is in any case a superior right which should prevail.

Science knows how to do it.

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