

3rd International Conference and Exhibition on **Addiction Research & Therapy**

August 04-06, 2014 Hilton-Chicago/Northbrook, Chicago, USA

The merry go round of gambling relapse - A qualitative study

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Despite pervasive negative impacts, research into problem gambling is limited with little understanding of factors that lead to relapse which is a significant problem. This paper summarises findings of a qualitative study about predictors, protective factors and processes involved in relapse with particular focus on what leads problem gamblers (PGs), to repeatedly relapse despite ongoing despair. Purposive sample selection was used from PGs, significant others, and workers with direct experience of relapse. The first phase used 5 focus groups (N=35) to obtain an initial description. The second phase, in-depth interviews (N=19) provided a deeper understanding. An external auditor reviewed the fidelity of methodology and analytic process. It was established there is a strong relationship between cognition and urge to gamble. For example, erroneous cognitions counteracted the 'pull' away from relapse. The urge then emerged fully and memories about previous harm were no longer available. The PGs described this as the "zone" which prolonged relapse. When the relapse episode ended, as money was exhausted, participants experienced despair, which triggered ongoing relapse. Planning the next gambling relapse became an immediate solution to escape this despair. Learning from negative consequences was not possible at this time and the relapse "Merry Go Round continued. This study provides the first empirical qualitative understanding about relapse in problem gambling in particular why PGs continue to relapse. As a result of these findings there are new areas for research and harm minimisation interventions to be considered.

Biography

Jane Oakes is an experienced mental health professional with a PhD candidacy and a Masters of Mental Health Sciences degree in CBT with 15 years experience in the assessment and treatment of Problem Gambling, Anxiety and Depression. She is a lecturer at Flinders University in the School of Medicine and a senior CBT therapist and training coordinator at the Statewide Gambling Therapy Service at Flinders Medical Centre South Australia. In her academic role she teaches and supervises students in CBT and conducts research primarily in the area of problem gambling and relapse.

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