Self-awareness in problem gambling

Associate Professor Paul Delfabbro,
University of Adelaide
Outline of Presentation

- What is self-awareness? -application to problem gambling policies and interventions
- Different elements of self-awareness
- Applications in treatment settings
- Applications in ‘responsible’ gambling policies
- Recent observations that pose interesting areas for research / conceptual work
Why is this important?

- **Assumption 1**: Awareness and self-monitoring leads to attitudinal and behaviour change.
- **Assumption 2**: Evoking higher level (cortical) processes helps to over-ride low level process (urges, conditioned responses, habits).
Problem Recognition

- What is it that makes a person suddenly realise that they’ve got a problem before harms develop?
- Only 10% of people with gambling-problems seek help and many stop without assistance
- What is ‘clicking the switch’ for these people?
Where these ideas are applied in gambling interventions

- Self-help books
- Treatments (e.g., CBT, Cog-therapy)
- Public health/ media campaigns
- Responsible gambling information
- Pre-commitment strategies
- Pop-up reminders on machines
Importance in other areas

- There are elements of this in behavioural interventions for anger-management and behavioural problems.
- Stop-Think—Consider consequences.
- BUT also cognitive and motivational approaches that involve weighing up benefits and consequences.
Theoretical Frameworks

- The recognition for self-awareness and change is implicit in a number of theories of behavioural change

- Stages of Change models (contemplation)

- Protection motivation theory (awareness of risks to self leads to a motivation to change)
Is it mindfulness?

- Mindfulness is more about awareness and acceptance of feelings / internal states /
- Self-awareness is also about knowing the environment and how one fits into it
- It has a lot more elements of cognitive appraisal
Is it situational awareness?

- It’s more than just ‘situational awareness’ which is more about knowledge of the external environment.
- Self-awareness = recognition that one is an actor/player in an external environment to which one must adapt.
- Awareness requires knowledge of the situation AND oneself and the interaction between the two.
How do people become aware?

- Several elements in gambling
- Risk perception
- Self-monitoring
- Reflection and understanding
- Reframing consequences/choices/contingencies/outcome narratives
Risk Perception

- What is a risky activity?
- **2 Elements**: Stake vs. Probability
- Magnitude of stakes (what is a lot of money? What level of expenditure would cause harm?)
- Likelihood of winning / odds
- Combination (expected return)
Risk Perception: 2

- In gambling, risk also relates to awareness of the processes by which people lose control of gambling.
- Erroneous beliefs; urges; triggers; behavioural patterns such as chasing; harms.
Monitoring and Awareness

- What is happening?
- How much am I spending?
- How often am I gambling?
- How long have I been gambling?
- How much am I winning and losing?
Reflection and Understanding

- Applied in public health/media campaigns
  “Think of what you are really gambling with?“

- “Gamble responsibly!“

- Cognitive interventions that focus on the odds/nature of gambling/erroneous beliefs

- But does all of this work?
Consequences and Outcomes

- If effective, increased awareness should lead to the ability to weigh up the consequences of different courses of action.
- If I do X, then Y will not happen.
- Greater higher level control to over-ride and stop when urges/ habitual thoughts are activated.
How important is self-awareness?

- Addressing denial/ objective appraisal of self, gambling and problem gambling
- Influences motivation for change and likelihood of sustained changes
Why I’m interested

- Evidence from pre-commitment trial in SA (Worldsmart)
- Messaging alone seemed to reduce expenditure
- Limits were similar to personal ones observed in self-report studies, so were the limits really all that important?
Pop-Up Message studies

- Sally Gainsbury’s work on pop-up messages: self-reflective (Do you think it’s time to stop?) better than factual (The odds are) or informative (gambling can cause harm)

- Self-reflection as a strategy? What makes people accept messages re. gambling?
Research Questions

- **Pre-commitment**: Do people appreciate and try to prevent risks associated with gambling? When people set limits on EGMs, what do those limits mean?
- Would giving people regular EGM activity statements be effective in controlling expenditure? What about messages?
- **Psychology**: Do many gamblers/drinkers really appraise their behaviour? An interesting area is binge gambling or episodic gambling. Do people view this as ‘problem gambling’?
Role of Attributional Biases

- Do people fail to look critically at their behaviour as being symptomatic of a problem?
- Is behaviour externalised and ascribed to external factors / situations (I only did it because of X, Y)- it’s not something I do ‘ALL the time’)
- “I only drank/ gambled heavily because it was my Saturday night, special night out- I don’t do it the rest of the week.”