



# Odds and Ends



The Newsletter of The Gambling Clinic at the University of Memphis

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## Research Suggests Indicators for Problem Gambling

**O**ur research lab at The University of Memphis recently completed a study that considered how much gambling is too much. The study investigated behavioral indicators of pathological gambling in college students. The following table summarizes the patterns of gambling behavior associated with pathological gambling.

<i>Behavior associated with pathological gambling</i>	
Monthly Frequency of gambling episodes (days)	>1.2 episodes
Duration of monthly gambling (hours)	>2.1 hours
Percentage of monthly income intended for wager	>6.1%
Percentage of monthly income actually wagered	>10.5%

Individuals above these cutoffs were more likely to be pathological gamblers and may benefit from treatment. These behavioral indicators appear to be effective initial markers in characterizing high-risk gambling behavior among college students but should not be used to make a definitive decision about the diagnosis of pathological gambling.

For the clinician or health provider, an individual reporting gambling behavior in excess of these limits may trigger a more thorough assessment. Such an assessment may include the South Oaks Gambling Screen or another diagnostic screen. Early identification offers an ideal opportunity for cost efficient prevention and early intervention.

In addition to these indicators, other variables including psychological distress and having a parent or guardian with a gambling problem improved classification of individuals as pathological gamblers. For example, if an individual comes in with a clinical level of distress and is also gambling, it may be important to evaluate for the possibility of a gambling problem. Similarly, if an individual who gambles has a parent or guardian with gambling problems, an evaluation can discern whether the individual is experiencing problems related to their gambling.



## Guidelines for Moderated Gambling

**K**nowing that there are patterns and levels of gambling that are associated with pathological gambling begs several questions. How much can one gamble without having problems? Is abstaining from gambling the only option for pathological gamblers or can they continue gambling at some moderated level without experiencing problems? A former member of our research team now at the University of Connecticut just completed a study to address these questions.

One year after treatment, researchers interviewed individuals being treated for pathological gambling who had chosen a non-abstinent recovery. Individuals' gambling behavior over the year was collected and compared with an indicator of pathological gambling, the South Oaks Gambling Screen (see issue 3 of Odds and Ends or [thegamblingclinic.memphis.edu](http://thegamblingclinic.memphis.edu)). By comparing gambling behaviors with problems experienced, the researchers were able to determine cutoffs indicating when a person began to experience problems from gambling.



<i>Behavior associated with problem-free gambling</i>	
Monthly frequency of gambling episodes (days)	<1 episodes
Duration of monthly gambling (hours)	<1.5 hours
Percentage of monthly income wagered	<1.9%

The results can be seen in the table above. Gambling at this level or lower significantly reduced the risk of developing problems from gambling. Clinicians can use this information to help gauge whether an individual is gambling in a controlled manner or may be putting themselves at increased risk of developing problems.

These results also demonstrate that abstinence is not the only option for pathological gamblers. Moderated gambling is a viable alternative for some pathological gamblers who wish to reduce their gambling but not discontinue it completely. Providing options for treatment is important as research has shown individuals are more motivated and perform better when they choose their own treatment goals.

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***We want to hear from you!***

Please send your questions or  
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Each month, we'll select and  
answer several questions from our  
readers. We want to hear  
your concerns and look  
forward to your feedback.

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## Meet The Gambling Clinic

**J**ames P. Whelan, Ph.D., is a Yankee by birth, but a Southerner by heart. He was born and raised in Philadelphia, PA and moved to Memphis to attend the doctoral clinical psychology program at Memphis State University. After returning to the northeast to complete his clinical training at Robert Wood Johnston Medical School, Dr. Whelan returned to Memphis to join the faculty at the University of Memphis and direct the Psychological Services Center.

Presently, he is an Associate Professor of Psychology and co-directs The Institute for Gambling Education and Research. His research interests center on the assessment and treatment of problem and pathological gambling, adolescent gambling, the prevention of problem gambling. He has over 40 publications including research papers on gambling behavior and treatment. He has presented at national and international conferences. As for profes-

sional service, Dr. Whelan has served on the Boards of the Tennessee Psychological Association, the Association for the Advancement of Applied Sport Psychology, and the American Psychological Association's Division of Exercise and Sport Psychology. In addition, Dr. Whelan has served the ethics committees of two associations and the Tennessee Board of Examiners in Psychology. As for his heart, Dr. Whelan was able to overcome his Yankee background to convince a true Southern woman to marry him. The Whelans live in Germantown with their two daughters.



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COMMENTS,  
QUESTIONS,  
SUGGESTIONS?

WE WANT  
YOUR  
FEEDBACK!!