

**Connecticut Council on Problem Gambling  
Helpline Evaluation Summary Report**

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*National Conference on Problem Gambling  
June 4-6, 1999  
Detroit, Michigan*

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**Introduction**

The Connecticut Council on Problem Gambling Helpline is a 24-hour, toll-free information and referral service. Callers reach an answering service which then pages one of four trained recovering compulsive gamblers who rotate coverage. Receiving the caller's name, number and brief message on an alpha pager, the Helpline staff member then contacts the caller, who has been informed by the answering service to expect a return call within a few minutes.

Helpline follow-up calls for the purpose of evaluation were conducted with 100 callers from September 1998 through May 1999. The callers had contacted the Helpline from May 1998 through February 1999. The time between the caller's initial contact with the Helpline and the follow-up evaluation interview ranged from three to five months. The length of the evaluation interviews ranged from seven to twenty-five minutes.

As coordinator of the Helpline, I have been the only CCPG staff working on follow-up calls. Each completed call represents approximately four to five unsuccessful attempts to reach a live caller.

**Demographic Background**

The criteria for selection of Helpline callers to participate in the evaluation were:

- a relatively equal distribution of callers for each of the four Helpline staff;
- a relatively equal distribution of male and female callers;
- a relatively equal distribution of gamblers and significant others;
- a relatively equal distribution across geographic locales.

Due to these criteria and the fact that we accessed Helpline callers who were available and willing to speak with us by phone within a certain time frame, the demographics of callers in this evaluation differ from the overall Helpline caller demographics.

The evaluation instrument is a 34-item questionnaire. Most of the questions use a multiple-choice format. Fourteen of the 34 items invite comments from the interviewee.

### **What the Callers Said about the Helpline Service They Received**

*All percentages are based on the 100 completed evaluations.*

- 97% reported it was easy to find the Helpline number.
- 100% reported the answering service answered promptly.
- 91% of the calls were reported returned within 20 minutes:
  - 56% of the calls were reported returned within five minutes;
  - 24% of the calls were reported returned within 10 minutes;
  - 11% of the calls were reported returned within 20 minutes.
- 98% reported that the Helpline staff seemed knowledgeable about the gambling problem.
- 97% reported that the Helpline staff made helpful suggestions.
- 75% reported that they had followed (any of) the suggestions.
- 95% reported being "very satisfied/satisfied" with the overall Helpline service.
  - 74% reported "very satisfied";
  - 21% reported "satisfied".
- 100% reported they approved of the follow-up evaluation call.

### Options Accessed

- Sixty-seven percent of all Helpline evaluation respondents accessed some kind of gambling related help;
  - 37% accessed *GA* or *Gam-Anon*
  - 10% accessed professional treatment
  - 13% accessed both
  - 33% accessed neither *GA/Gam-Anon* nor professional treatment
  - 7% accessed some other form of treatment
- 53.7% of the gamblers responding to the evaluation reported seeking help from *GA*.
- 74% of the gamblers who sought help from *GA* reported it was "very helpful/helpful":
  - 40.7% reported *GA* was "very helpful"
  - 33.3% reported *GA* was "helpful";
  - 14.8% reported "neutral";
  - 7.4% reported "unhelpful".
- 26% of the significant others responding to the evaluation reported seeking help from *Gam-Anon*.
- 81.8% of the significant others who sought help from *Gam-Anon* reported it was "very helpful/helpful".
- Of the 19% of respondents who reported seeking help from the state sponsored compulsive gambling treatment program, 73.6% reported the program was "very helpful/helpful".

### Current Status

- Of the gamblers who reported seeking help from *GA*, 41.3% were still attending *GA* at the time of the evaluation.

- Compared to when the original call was made to the Helpline:  
50% of the respondents reported that the gamblers' current level of gambling is "much less frequent/less frequent";  
26% reported that the gambler is "not gambling at all";  
12% reported that the gambler is gambling "at the same level";  
4% reported the gambling is "more frequent/much more frequent";  
8% are "not sure" about the gambler's current level of gambling.
- Compared to when the original call was made to the Helpline:  
69% of the respondents reported that the current negative effects of the gambling problem are "much better/better";  
19% reported the current negative effects of the gambling are "at the same level";  
6% reported the current negative effects of the gambling are "worse/much worse";  
6% are "not sure" about the current negative effects.

### **What We Have Learned**

The two primary goals of this evaluation were to (a) learn how effective the Helpline is in getting the gambler and/or the significant other the help that is needed, and what happens to them over time and (b) assess caller satisfaction with the service they received when they called the Helpline.

As evidenced by the data reported here, the vast majority of callers report satisfaction with the Helpline, the Helpline staff, the suggestions received, and the quality of help when it was accessed.

Ultimately we hope that every caller who calls the Helpline, whether the gambler or significant other, receives the help that is needed. On August 1, 1998, to further increase the likelihood that callers will receive the help they need, Helpline staff began the practice of asking callers who indicated an interest in professional help whether they would like to receive a follow-up call from the state-sponsored compulsive gambling treatment program. Many of the callers seeking professional help have received a follow-up call, and early evidence suggests this practice is increasing the numbers of people accessing the state sponsored compulsive gambling treatment program.

The Helpline follow-up evaluation calls reported in this document have demonstrated, in many cases, to be an additional intervention for the caller, in that the contact reinforces the inclination of some callers to seek/continue with help. For other callers it is an opportunity to ask new questions or get clarification on information accessed in the original call to the Helpline.

The focus of the questions in the evaluation instrument is on the gambler. Therefore, the reported information is less clear if we are speaking with the significant other. For example, many questions are framed so that the significant other is reporting on how the gambler rates the services that were accessed and what happened to the gambler. To better assess the data, the questions should be framed so that the interviewee is responding from his/her own direct experience. Our next step is to revise the evaluation form so it more accurately captures the desired information.

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**Companion Information**

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