As freshers' week approaches, charity warns that over 264,000 students could be at risk of problem gambling

Thursday 5 September, 2019

The Young Gamers and Gamblers Education Trust (YGAM) has published the results of a survey that looks specifically at higher education students, their attitudes to gaming and gambling and considers the related behaviours and potential challenges.

Whilst a large number of those asked said that they enjoyed the social side of both gaming and gambling, the survey results indicate that it can also have a negative impact on the academic performance of students and the quality of their friendships and social activities. In addition, for the students who gamble, nearly half said that they are constantly concerned about their financial situation.

Summary of results

- **Gaming is a popular way to reduce stress.** Students are finding the university experience stressful. With **79%** of students playing digital games, easing the pressures may be a positive benefit but **48%** of those who game every day said it has got in the way of friendships and studies.
- **The more frequently students game, the greater the impact**. The research revealed that for those who game every day, one fifth have a negative sense of belonging at university, and over one-third say it has got in the way of their social life.
- **264,000 students in the UK are at some risk from gambling** with around **88,000** already defined as problem gamblers.
- **59% of students who gamble say they are always worrying about their financial situation** while **16%** have gambled more than they could afford.
- **Students gamble to escape the stresses of university**. For students who are moderate risk or problem gamblers the findings show they are more likely to gamble to 'cheer them up when they are depressed', even though **9 in 10** feel guilty about the way they have gambled.
- **One third of these students say their gambling habits have a negative effect on their wellbeing**, over half have considered dropping out of university and one in seven have a negative perception of their overall university experience.

The full report is available to download at www.ygam-research.org

Helping to Improve student life

As a charity committed to practical action, YGAM will be expanding their work with universities, students' unions and others working with students in higher education on the key recommendations from this research.

- **Increase understanding of the wellbeing and support services available and how to access them**, reaching students whom gaming or gambling is negatively affecting them.
- **Raise awareness of gambling and gaming as addictions,** providing students with a safe space to explore the risks and seek support.
- **Provide accessible budgeting and financial advice** particularly for students starting university.
- **Extend easy access to social events and communities** to help students build positive social relationships
- **Provide additional academic support** to reduce the anxiety about academic performance, workload pressures, uncertainty about the future

Former gambling addict, Joe Woof explains: "For me, going to university fuelled my addiction, it gave me independence and access to more money than I'd ever had before. I could go wherever I wanted and spend money on whatever I wanted, without anyone really knowing. My mind was on gambling 24/7 which meant I missed numerous lectures and essay deadlines, I was living two lives, it was exhausting, stressful and really effected my mental health. Sadly, my problems continued for years after, which led to the breakdown of my marriage and at my lowest, I even attempted to take my own life.

There is still a long road ahead but I'm off the bet and I can see a better future. Raising awareness of the potential dangers is so important, especially whilst at university. I didn't even know that you could be addicted to gambling. I was careful to avoid the other dangers I was exposed to at that point in life (e.g.

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alcohol) but I was very naïve when it came to the harms of gambling, as I just didn't have the awareness – awareness campaigns, like YGAM's may have helped me or one of my friends spot the warning signs and do something about it."

Of the findings, **Lee Willows, YGA**M CEO says: "There has been growing concern around the impact of gaming and gambling for young people and the purpose of this survey was to better understand a less well researched community, students in higher education. Students at university are often away from home, managing their finances and their lives independently for the first time. The research shows that we need to continue to expand our university partnerships and work together to raise awareness around financial advice, well-being, support services as well as the potential risks of gambling and gaming."

Dr. Sarah Hodge, **Lecturer in Cyberpsychology and Psychology, Bournemouth University**, welcomes the research: "This insight report provides valuable statistics on the prevalence and behavioural habits for university students. Representing university students is particularly important as university life provides potential vulnerabilities, such as the changes in financial circumstances and time management.

Gaming continues to be a popular past time among university students, with developments in technology creating more potential overlaps between gaming and gambling. Some of these developments include the gamification of gambling and increased accessibility of both gaming and gambling. This combination of gaming and gambling behaviour also provides a good foundation for the following: further research in the area, teaching students about gaming and gambling behaviour, comparing and contrasting gaming and gambling behaviour, and developing further support for university students."

Helen Rhodes, Programme Director
at the **Gambling Commission** said: "We welcome this research by YGAM which provides further information, detail and understanding on the relationship between young people and gambling.

There are a variety of actions and educational initiatives which are connected with the research and it is important these are undertaken in a planned, joined-up way. The National Strategy to Reduce Gambling Harms, launched earlier this year, will be the most effective way to ensure this vital coordination and partnership work takes place and drives faster progress to reducing gambling harms. We look forward to working with colleagues at YGAM in the months ahead."

The survey of over 2,000 current students in higher education was developed by Red Brick Research, specialists in higher education and student research *and carried out independently of the gaming and gambling sectors*.

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