Perception of gambling as a ‘man’s problem’ leads to fewer women seeking help

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GamCare’s Women’s Programme uncovers scale of female gambling losses and the negative impact of stigma faced by women.

- *Gambling perceived as a predominantly ‘male’ activity*
- *This can result in women experiencing greater harm as they may be reluctant to seek the support they need.*
- *Women’s experiences of gambling are not generally understood within women’s support services*

GamCare, the largest provider of support and treatment for gambling related harms across Great Britain, has released the first report from its pioneering Women’s Programme, funded by the Tampon Tax to deliver outreach, education and awareness on the subject. The report outlines worrying trends amongst women who are being harmed by gambling.

Gamblers identifying as female who were interviewed through the programme (a representative sample) reported feeling high levels of shame and stigma because of societal perceptions that gambling is a ‘male’ activity in which women should not, or do not, take part. Some reported an assumption that gambling could not be damaging to them or their families as they were not seen as financial ‘owners’ in the home. These perceptions contributed to low levels of help seeking, and higher levels of gambling harm.

In just the first year of delivering the programme, GamCare focused on barriers to women accessing help and in doing so worked with 300 organisations and more than 3,000 professionals to deliver their CPD accredited training – increasing the confidence of attendees to talk to women about gambling harms and support those affected. Through this programme they aim to use the learning to increase the skills and experience of thousands of intermediaries who can go on to better identify women who need support for gambling related harms.

GamCare’s *Women’s Voices* survey[1]
showed:

- Women who gamble report significant financial losses, with many reporting losses in the tens of thousands.
- Shame and stigma are significant barriers for those identifying as female to engaging with support services. Respondents reported that societal expectations of women – i.e. as needing to be ‘good mothers’ and/or homemakers – still need to be tackled.
- The universal issue reported was a detrimental impact on their mental health.

Carly, a female gambler who contacted GamCare last year, says: “*I had been struggling with gambling for around three years. I felt like nobody would understand – everything I had seen said gambling was something for men, not women and not me, but I knew I needed help. My ‘rock bottom’ was… when I lost my home, my job and the relationships that were the most important to me. I knew something had to change, otherwise I would feel like giving up altogether.”*

One woman who contacted GamCare, who does not wished to be named, shared the guilt and shame that her gambling impacted on her husband and children: “*It’s really complex, the shame you feel – it’s like you’re letting everyone down. My message to other women experiencing harms because of gambling is that you’re not alone. It can happen to anyone, and you shouldn’t be ashamed to ask for help.”*

Anna Hemmings, Chief Executive of GamCare, says:

“The issues that women are facing are often hidden from support services. Our Women’s Programme has told us that we need to remove barriers for women to access help with gambling related harm, but we also need to ensure that those providing that support are better equipped to help them.

We must get to grips with the unnecessary shame and stigma women feel around asking for help.

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Gambling is not just a male activity, and it can affect women in significant, potentially life-changing ways.

We have already achieved a lot in the first year of this programme, and I'm looking forward to the second year of the programme where we will be spreading the learning to improve support for women."

GamCare receives funding from the Tampon Tax to deliver their Women's Programme, working with a nationwide network of organisations who support vulnerable women, raising awareness of how gambling is linked with issues affecting women and helping to better identify women in need and engage them with the right support before issues escalate.

GamCare will continue to strengthen referral pathways into support and treatment for women affected by gambling, as well as continuing to gather lived experience from women across the UK and broadening the evidence-base for treatment that works.

For more information see www.gamcare.org.uk

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Media Enquiries

For more information contact Catherine Sweet, GamCare Head of Marketing and Communications:

catherine.sweet@gamcare.org.uk
/ 020 7801 7028.

Woolf Thomson Jones: +44 (0)7376392693

Notes to Editors

GamCare – Working to minimise gambling-related harm

- GamCare operates the National Gambling Helpline on Freephone 0808 8020 133 or via web chat at www.gamcare.org.uk, providing information, advice and support for anyone affected by problem gambling, funded by GambleAware. Advisers are available 24/7, every day of the year.
- GamCare also provides a range of free treatment (face to face, online or over the phone) for anyone affected by problem gambling across England, Scotland and Wales, funded by GambleAware, as well as Forum and daily chatrooms so that people can speak to others experiencing similar issues and seek support. Find out more at www.gamcare.org.uk
- For the full Women's Programme first year report please click here to download [link]
- For more detail on our Women's Programme visit gamcare.org.uk/our-work/womens-programme/

1. As part of the Women's Programme, GamCare conducted a 'Women's Voices Survey' of a representative sample of women who had sought help. Issues identified include levels of debt and expressions of suicidal thoughts. By definition, the sample does not include the much greater proportion of women who have not yet sought help or support.

Company Contact:

GamCare

T. 02078017000
E. press@gamcare.org.uk
W. https://www.gamcare.org.uk

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