

Gambling With Sex

While many are still debating the “Yes” or “No” results of the gambling referendum, a greater gambling issue remains on which we must act—sexual gambling. The number of gambling addicts and problem gamblers in The Bahamas is not really known; however, it is evident that there are more who are addicted to sex than to gambling. As I conjectured last week, based on the gambling ratio in other countries, there might be about 3,500 to 10,000 addicted and problem gamblers in our country. But based on the number of illegitimate births, abortions, divorces due to adultery, rape, shacking up, and other sexual indiscretions, it is clear to me that sexual addicts and sexual abusers far out-number problem gamblers and gambling addicts.

Perhaps some are wondering what I mean by “gambling with sex.” Here it is: Whenever someone has sex with someone who is not a spouse, there is a 50/50 percent chance that one can become infected with a sexually transmitted disease, become pregnant or get someone pregnant. That’s very serious. Here is another frightening way of putting it. When someone has casual sex with multiple partners, there is also a 50/50 percent chance that these persons are having sex with other multiple partners; therefore, this behavior seriously increases one’s risk of getting a life-threatening, sexually transmitted infection.

What is sexual addiction? Psychologist Michael Herkov in his article, “What is Sexual Addiction” states: “Sexual addiction is best described as a progressive intimacy disorder characterized by compulsive sexual thoughts and acts. Like all addictions, its negative impact on the addict and on family members increases as the disorder progresses. Over time, the addict usually has to intensify the addictive behavior to achieve the same results. For some sex addicts, behavior does not progress beyond compulsive masturbation or the extensive use of pornography or phone or computer sex services. For others, addiction can involve illegal activities such as exhibitionism, voyeurism, obscene phone calls, child molestation or rape.”

What is gambling addiction? Here is what HelpGuide.org states about gambling addiction and problem gambling. “**Gambling addiction**, also known as compulsive gambling, is a type of impulse-control disorder. Compulsive gamblers can’t control the impulse to gamble, even when they know their gambling is hurting themselves or their loved ones. Gambling is all they can think about and all they want to do, no matter the consequences. Compulsive gamblers keep gambling whether they’re up or down, broke or flush, happy or depressed. Even when they know the odds are against them, even when they can’t afford to lose, people with a gambling addiction can’t “stay off the bet.” Gamblers can have a problem, however, without being totally out of control. **Problem gambling** is any gambling behavior that disrupts your life. If you’re preoccupied with gambling, spending more and more time and money on it, chasing losses, or gambling despite serious consequences, you have a gambling problem.”

Once again, I am proposing that although problem gambling or addicted gambling can cause serious emotional, financial, and relationship problems, there are other extremely serious social ills that are far more devastating than gambling or that are more pervasive in the society. This means we have to truly place our energy (greater than we did for gambling) to provide education, healing, and prevention of these social ills. The one I am emphasizing in the article is sexual abuse/misuse/addiction, etc.

Several years ago I shared the following stunning information about sexual addiction in my

article "Dangerous Sexual Secrets." "Loneliness is one of the main factors in sexual addiction. " We do know that at least 81% of sex addicts were sexually abused as children, 74% were physically abused, and 97% were emotionally abused. Most, if not all were deprived of physical touch, love, nurture, and affirmation." Dr. Mark Laaser.

There are several reasons people get addicted to sex. First, some use sex as medication. It can be used as a "mood elevator or relaxant." If an addict wants to feel a certain way, he then goes to have sex to achieve it. Second, the brain gets used to it. Brain chemistry adjusts to whatever chemicals we put into it. "These include the chemical produced when we think about or engage in sex. Over time the brain will need more and more of the same chemical to produce the same feeling. Sex addicts will need to think about or be sexual more and more over time."

Buying a raffle ticket (a simple form of gambling) or pulling the wheel of a slot machine in casino are actions which in themselves do not cause problems to society or to individuals. However, one fun-filled "innocent" sex night can lead to death or a life-long painful illness. That's serious!

I hope by now you are beginning to understand that the problem of sexual indiscretion and sexual addiction are very detrimental social ills. I am encouraging religious, social and political leaders to start a nation-wide education program, more powerful than the recent campaign for or against gambling. We need to stop being hypocritical as a people. Since this is a pluralistic and secular society (rightly so), the primary goal of the program would not necessarily be to try to make everyone virgins, but to teach responsible living. The ultimate goal is to educate about the dangers of indiscriminate sexual behavior. It is to teach that indiscriminate sexual behavior is extremely emotionally, physically, and financially, and psychologically destructive to the individuals and the society. It would be hypocritical if we could not find the same political will, finances, and time to educate our people about the dangerous behavior of sexual gambling.

Barrington Brennen is a marriage and family therapist. Send you questions to barringtonbrennen@gmail.com or visit www.soencouragement.org or call 1-242-327-1980.