

# **Gambling, Problem Gambling, and Criminality in an Arrestee Population**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study sought to answer 5 questions:

1. What types of gambling specific, i.e., illegal gambling crimes, have resulted in arrests?
2. What types of gambling related criminal activities, i.e., crimes other than illegal gambling, have been committed in order to obtain funds for gambling or gambling related debts?
3. What is the frequency of gambling and problem gambling among arrestees by the time of the arraignment?
4. What types of crimes are committed by gamblers and problem gamblers compared to non-gamblers?
5. What is the size of the problem gambler population among arrestees?

In addition this study sought to test the feasibility of using the Lie/Bet for an arrestee population during their booking phase. The Lie/Bet Screen was created and validated by Johnson, E., Hamer, M., Nora, R. M., Benito, T., Einstein, N., & Engelhart, C. in 1997 and 1998. Data was collected by interviewers from the University of South Florida at the Hillsborough Central Booking Facility in Tampa, Florida on 1,445 arrestees in a 3-month period. Data was collected using the Lie/Bet Questionnaire for 959 arrestees who agreed to volunteer this information (Volunteers), and additional data on the total sample of 1,445 was obtained from the Sheriff's Department public access website regarding data obtained at booking. For the Volunteer group 772 arrestees were male (80.6%) and 186 (19.4%) were female, their mean age was 32.9, and there were 343 Blacks (35.8%), 405 Whites (43.3%), 185 Hispanics (19.3%), and 23 Others (2.4%). Nearly one-third, 30.6% (291) did not graduate High School; 37.4% (356) had graduated High School, completed their GED or graduated from a trade school; 20.1% (191) had some College and 12% (114) were College graduates.

The most frequent charge in the current arrest of the Volunteers was for property crimes (31%) followed by drug crimes (22.8%). Only one person in the total sample was arrested for a gambling violation. For the Volunteers, 2.9% said that they had committed gambling related crimes.

Thirty-six percent of the sample of Volunteers gambled once or twice during the past year while 17% gambled once a week or more frequently.

In applying the Lie/Bet Screen we found that the prevalence of problem gamblers among arrestees was 17.4%. If we apply it to the total number of bookings (60,183) during 2009 at the Hillsborough County Jail then we may estimate that the total number of arrestees with gambling problems at the time of arraignment was 10,472 during that one full year.

Most of the studies of problem gambling using offenders have diagnosed them while they are imprisoned. Screening or diagnosing at the booking stage provides the possibility of identifying a greater number of individuals with problem gambling needs (since most people who come into contact with the Criminal Justice System do not make it to prison). Identifying individuals with problem gambling at an early stage of their contact with the Criminal Justice System provides an opportunity to reduce the likelihood of their return if the motivation for their criminal activity is their problematic gambling behavior.

In sum, this study has demonstrated the feasibility of screening offenders for problem gambling at the initial stage of contact with the Criminal Justice System by using a short two-question screening instrument i.e., the Lie/Bet Questionnaire. The large percentage of offenders identified in this study as problem or pathological gamblers compared to the much lower percentage found in the Florida general population indicates that there is a need to provide intervention for offenders. There is an advantage to providing various level of intervention at the earliest stage in the Criminal Justice process since most offenders will be eliminated from the System the further into the process the case moves. The development and adoption of early identification and intervention programs may help reduce the human and financial toll of problem and pathological gambling for many who would not otherwise be engaged. The essential elements of early procedures or intervention programs that may be

adopted are: 1) screening of offenders for gambling problems in detention facilities; 2) initiating Gambling Courts similar to Drug Courts where the focus is on prevention of recidivism through diversion or other programs; 3) development and adoption of gambling prevention and treatment programs, extending the work of the FCCG's training program for law enforcement, probation, and correctional authorities.