Effects Of Gambling Essay, Research Paper

Gambling is prominent in today’s society. This can be seen especially through politics. Everywhere voters are electing people to office who are pro gambling. William Thompson of the University of Nevada (1994) describes politicians by stating, “It’s part of the American landscape, they’ll trade morality for dollars” (1). In North and South Carolina, for example, the last governor election showed that the people were for legal gambling by voting in governors who wanted a lottery. Now in the U.S., 47 states including the District of Columbia have legalized gambling. This increase in gambling is argued to be good for the economy, but there is further proof that it not only hurts the economy but society as well.

Gambling has become outrageous. In England last year a bookmaking firm called William Hill of London offered bets on the end of the world. Some of these bets include civilization destroyed by mass suicide at 100 million to one odds, destruction by aliens at 500,000 to one odds, and worldwide floods at 100,000 to one odds. One man put a pound on 6,666,666 to one odds that the world would end at six p.m. on the sixth day of the sixth month of 1999. Another man bet at one million to one odds that the world would end on August 11, 1999 at 12:50 p.m. (ironically that happens to be Jerry Springer’s time slot on many stations) (Playboy 20).

Super Bowl bets in Las Vegas were also astounding this past year according to Time magazine. People bet on things like a completed first pass-attempt by John Elway, the jersey number of the first person to score, the team to score the longest touchdown, and the total number of fumbles by both teams. (18)

The NCAA men’s basketball tournament brought in millions of dollars this past season through gambling. Approximately 80 million was wagered with Nevada bookmakers. This was the first time that the tournament had more bets than the 78 million bet on the Super Bowl. Aside from the legal betting, the FBI estimated that 2.5 million was wagered illegally on the tournament.

Many college students/athletes are now getting involved in this sort of gambling. A 1996 study completed by the University of Cincinnati surveyed 2,000 male student-athletes about NCAA rule violations and found that 25% gambled on college events other than their own. Also, 4% admitted to wagering on their own games, and 3% changed the outcome of a game in which they participated (Saum 2). In 1998, a study at a University in the Southeast Conference involving 1000 students showed that athletes were nearly twice as likely to become problem gamblers than non-athletes. Another study was conducted by surveying 1,700 students from six different colleges and universities. It found that 33% of males and 15% of females in college gamble at least once a week.

College student gamblers tend to be people who believe they have control of their own destiny, take risks, and feel they ha the skill to be successful in whatever they do. Many college athletes have these same characteristics which could be one of the reasons they gamble.

Many cases of college athletes loosing eligibility over gambling exist. One in particular was at a Division I university where student athletes lost 20-30% playing time in a season over betting on professional football and basketball games. In another case at a Division III School, baseball players placed bets using parlay cards and were withheld from playing half of their season.

Sports wagering has become very popular and has grown immensely. One reason is that more games are televised. People like to bet on games they can watch. Another reason is that many residence halls are wired to the Internet. Through the Internet, people can place bets on any event at any time. Most like this easy access. Also, many students have access to credit cards. In a survey of students who applied for a loan, it was found that 65% have credit cards and 20% have four or more credit cards. The average balance for these cards is 2,200 dollars.

The NCAA is coming up with solutions to the problem of student and illegal wagering on games. One is to build relationships with law-enforcement officers, professional sports leagues, government officials, and game regulating bodies. The NCAA is also conducting investigations related to violations of NCAA rules. Minnesota University even had Dion Lee and Kevin Pendargast, former NCAA students convicted of illegal wagering, to speak to the student-athletes to try to convince the students of how wrong and harmful gambling can be.

Lotteries are another problem type of gambling. Lotteries were created and are now used to raise revenues without having to raise taxes, but instead they displace funds that would have been raised in some other way. For example, a state votes in a lottery to provide more money for schools, but the money is not added to that which is already spent on schools, the lottery money just replaces it. The former school money is used somewhere else.

The Georgia lottery can be considered an exception because it awards good academic students college scholarships. This isn’t a totally good thing though. The lottery tickets in poor areas than in upper class neighborhoods. Georgia uses its lottery revenues to give out HOPE scholarships (Helping Outstanding Pupils Educationally). But most of the students who receive this scholarship are from families who have an average income of $13,000 higher than the state average. So in essence, the poor pay for the wealthier students to go to college.

What kind of person plays the lottery? One study found that those with no high school diploma spent twice as much on the lottery per month than college graduates. Policy Studies Journal included that people with a low income (less than 10,000) spend eight times more on the lottery than those with high income (70,000 or over) (245-57). Assume for a moment that everyone who played the lottery was a casual player and spent the average amount of 74 dollars a year on tickets. If this were so then the sales for 1997 would have dropped from 36 billion to 7.4 billion.

Further, states with lotteries tend to have more crime than those states without according to The American Journal of Economics and Sociology. Property offenses per 100,000 population increases by 112.7% when a state operates a lottery. Since 1987, there has been an increase of an additional 5,478 property offenses in each state in every year that a lottery is operated (7-19).

Because of the easy access to lotteries and the Internet, children in America are now starting to gamble. The National Impact Study Commission provided a study reporting that the percentage of sixteen to seventeen year olds who are at risk of becoming pathological gamblers is twice that of adults. Children as young as eleven are gambling among themselves and picking up lottery tickets at the local convenience stores. Twelve to seventeen million juveniles in the U.S. have gambled for money, and as many as two million have experienced serious gambling-related problems. In 1970, the Mayo Clinic treated pathological gamblers between the ages of 30-35, but in 1990 it was 17-70 (Clarke 29).

Compulsive gamblers are a big problem. 2% of the U.S. population are compulsive while 3% are problem gamblers. 60% of these people planned how they would commit suicide and 20% attempted suicide. 99% of compulsive gamblers commit crimes, and 100% of compulsive gamblers become physically abusive, especially towards children. In 1992, there were 706 chapters of Gamblers Anonymous, but now in 1999 there are 1,340 chapters (National Coalition against Legalized Gambling 1).

There are three main reasons for the increasing problem of compulsive/problem/pathological gamblers. One is that the social attitudes towards gambling have changed form being negative to positive. Another reason is that gambling is accessible to everyone not only through existing legalized forms, but also through the Internet. The last reason for excessive gambling is that the number of people living in emotionally and financially stressed families is growing.

One main issue, and probably the one most talked about, is the effects of gambling on the economy. Right now, Americans are spending more on various types of gambling than on theme parks, video games, spectator sports, and movie tickets combined. As Donald Trump put it, “ People will spend a tremendous amount of money in casinos, money that they would normally spend on buying a new refrigerator or a new car. Local businesses will suffer because they’ll lose customer dollars to the casinos.” (qt. In National Coalition Against Legalized Gambling 5) This could be applied to lotteries, bets, and other forms of gambling.

For every dollar the state receives in gambling revenues, it pays nearly three dollars because of economic and social costs of gambling such as an increase in criminal justice and social welfare. Each problem gambler costs the government and private economy at least 13,200 dollars a year. Expanding gambling would be more costly than an additional hurricane Andrew every year (32 billion dollars in damage). Most pro-gambling people say that legalized gambling helps the economy, but overall they are wrong. For example Utah, a state with no legalized gambling, has the healthiest growing economy in the nation. Also, businesses prefer locating in gambling-free states because there are lower taxes and there are better community and business environments.

To help the tremendous gambling problem in the U.S, the Gambling Impact Study Commission has already issued recommendations to congress. Some include a ban on wagering on college and amateur events, a ban on Internet gambling, and a ban on credit-card cash-advance machines in gambling parlors. The commission suggest raising the legal age for wagering to twenty-one, and taxing gambling revenues to pay for programs to treat problem gamblers. They also want restrictions on political contributions for people operating or planning to operate gambling facilities.

The commission (1999) looks down on existing research on gambling calling it “flawed by insufficient data, poor or underdeveloped methodology, or researchers’ biases” (27). They also scorned at the attachment of money figures to some of the social problems caused by pathological gamblers saying, “ How can one calculate the ‘cost’ of the two children that died while locked in cars as their parents or caretakers gambled in nearby casinos?” (27).

People who support gambling do not have enough evidence to prove that it is good compared to all the problems that come along. Many of these problems can be solved if all gambling was banned. One day the country might realize how bad it is hurting itself.

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