Overestimated Stigma: Treatment Seeking Implications and Social Costs
Claire E. Baxter & Ian R. Newby-Clark, University of Guelph

INTRODUCTION
Do problem gamblers overestimate the stigma toward seeking treatment for problem gambling?

Does stigma impact day-to-day social interactions?

METHODS

STUDY 1: In an online survey (n = 1706), non-problem gamblers read a description of Sam, who was described as either a low-risk, moderate-risk or problem gambler and rated the extent to which they would stigmatize Sam.

Low-risk, moderate-risk and problem gamblers (LMPGs), predicted how non-problem gamblers (NPGs) would rate a person (Sam) in the same category as themselves.

STUDY 2: In the lab, one NPG was paired with an LMPG.

Participants (n = 116) were either privately told their PGSI score in the beginning of the study (stigma condition) or at the very end of the study (nonstigma condition). Participants never knew their partners’ score.

Before a conversation with their partner, participants rated how much social distance they anticipated from their partner. After the interaction, participants rated how much social distance they actually experienced.

LMPGs significantly perceived more stigma toward seeking treatment for problem gambling than was indicated by NPGs.

LMPGs also significantly underestimated the extent to which NPGs thought they should seek treatment.

STUDY 1

STUDY 2

RESULTS

Before the interaction, LMPGs anticipated greater social distance from their partner in the stigma condition compared to the nonstigma condition. NPGs anticipated less social distance from their partner in the stigma condition.

After the interaction, most participants perceived less social distance than before the interaction.

*Data are still being collected. These are non-significant trends. The final analysis will analyze these results by individual PGSI category.

DISCUSSION

Low Risk, Moderate Risk, and Problem Gamblers:
• Overestimated stigma toward seeking treatment
• Underestimated the extent to which others thought they should seek treatment
• May have anticipated stigma in social interactions

Actual stigma is a known barrier to treatment seeking for problem gambling (Rockloff & Schofield, 2004). Thus, an overestimation of stigma is particularly problematic.

Further, stigma not only impacts gambling related activities, but it may even impact day-to-day social interactions.

Anti-stigma campaigns may not only reduce actual stigma, but also perceived stigma in the eyes of the problem gambler.

REFERENCES

