

**The Gambling Accountability and Transparency Study
The New Mexico Council on Problem Gambling Crisis Hotline**

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The NMCPG manages a 24-hour crisis hotline in English and Spanish (1-800-572-1142). The hotline is posted at various casinos, fraternal organizations, and on lottery cards. It is also advertised on television and radio media. The hotline serves people with gambling problems and the relatives or significant others of problem gamblers. Callers may receive informational materials (e.g., a booklet on Personal and Financial Strategies for Loved Ones of Problem Gamblers), Gamblers Anonymous meeting schedules, and/or referrals to certified treatment providers.

The purpose of this part of the study was to describe the recent utilization of the New Mexico Council on Problem Gambling (NMCPG) hotline and the referral outcomes of the calls. Some of the representatives of the NMCPG hotline were contacted to obtain relevant information. Also, hotline data from September 2007 to August 2008 were reviewed and analyzed.

1. How many calls are received each month?

The crisis hotline received an average of 795 calls a month during the period of September 2007 to August 2008. The breakdown of calls per month is shown below in Table 1.

Table 1. Total calls received by month for the period of September-07 to August-08.

Month	Total Number of Calls
September 2007	982
October 2007	911
November 2007	871
December 2007	680
January 2008	856
February 2008	760
March 2008	1,077
April 2008	706
May 2008	623
June 2008	651
July 2008	662
August 2008	765

2. How many calls have been received in the past 12 months?

Using the above time frame and data, the NMCPG hotline received a total of 9,544 calls.

3. What is the breakdown of the calls (self, family member, etc.)?

Below is a breakdown of the calls by type of caller for the aforementioned 12-month time frame.

Table 2. Breakdown of calls by type of caller for the period of September-07 to August-08.

Month	Type of Caller			
	Gambler	Relative	Friend	Total
September-07	25	2	0	27
October-07	49	7	1	57
November-07	40	6	0	46
December-07	32	2	0	34
January-08	36	3	0	39
February-08	33	1	0	34
March-08	48	6	0	54
April-08	34	9	0	43
May-08	26	3	0	29
June-08	36	3	0	39
July-08	40	5	2	47
August-08	32	7	0	39
Total	431	54	3	488

Table 2 shows that most calls were made by individuals with gambling problems (N=431). Some calls were made by the relatives of gamblers (N=54), and very few calls were made by friends (N=3). A total of 488 calls were made by these individuals during the period of September 2007 to August 2008.

As can be seen, there is a tremendous discrepancy between items 1 and 2, and item 3 related to the number of calls received. The NMCPG considers all calls to the hotline as a type of outreach and includes all calls in its total tally, regardless of reason for calling (personal communication with Kandace Blanchard, 2008). Thus, although most people do not call the hotline to get help, they may use it in the future as a treatment resource. The data for items 3-5 includes only those calls that were made by people who were making crisis calls (i.e., they were asking for help or for a specific resource).

4. If related to treatment services, are people getting referred? To whom?

Yes, one of the most important features of the NMCPG hotline is its solid referral network of treatment providers. The NMCPG contracts therapists for an initial 10 sessions (and more if need be), and provides clients with the referrals and the vouchers to pay for these therapists from a treatment fund that is funded by the Responsible Gaming Association of New Mexico. Most of the therapists in this referral system have been certified by the NMCPG to treat clients with gambling problems. In addition to therapist referrals, the hotline representatives can provide callers with literature and information related to gambling treatment, credit counseling, and Gamblers Anonymous meetings. See Table 3 for a breakdown of treatment referral services.

Table 3. Breakdown of treatment service referrals to which people making crisis calls were referred for the period of September-07 to August-08.

Month	Treatment Referral Services				
	Counselor	GA	GamAnon	Literature	Total
September-07	24	8	0	1	33
October-07	40	31	2	7	80
November-07	31	30	2	4	67
December-07	30	18	0	2	50
January-08	32	16	3	2	53
February-08	29	23	1	0	53
March-08	47	28	0	1	76
April-08	31	22	4	2	59
May-08	40	12	2	3	57
June-08	32	20	1	2	55
July-08	39	19	3	1	62
August-08	26	23	4	0	53
Total	401	250	22	25	698*

*Some callers received multiple referrals (e.g., a therapist referral & a GA meeting schedule).

5. Are there data showing how many people who contact the hotline get help—follow up with the referral?

Yes, as shown below in Table 4, there are data that show the number of people who received a referral to a counselor, then followed through with the referral. Out of a total of 401 people who received a referral to a counselor, approximately 33% made the initial call to the counselor.

Table 4. Total calls to counselors by month for the period of September-07 to August-08.

Month	Total Calls to Counselors
September 2007	20
October 2007	16
November 2007	10
December 2007	10
January 2008	7
February 2008	7
March 2008	8
April 2008	11
May 2008	15
June 2008	8
July 2008	9
August 2008	10

In sum, the NMCPG hotline is widely advertised and it receives hundreds of calls a month. Callers to the hotline can expect to receive helpful information and resources for gambling problems. One of the most helpful resources the hotline offers is the network of treatment providers that the NMCPG has established and which the Responsible Gaming Association of New Mexico funds. These resources are available to both gamblers and their significant others.

NMCPG representatives may want to consider advertising the hotline in different settings to expand outreach to different groups. To illustrate, Cuadrado (1999) found that Latinos were more likely to find a gambling hotline number on the inside cover of a phone directory and Whites were more likely to learn of it from GA. Other venues that may be considered to increase awareness of the hotline by different ethnic and age groups include churches, community centers, senior centers, and non-profit organizations that work with these groups.

As seen in the data, there is a significant discrepancy between the total number of calls received (N=9,544) and the total number of crisis calls (N=488) during the 12-month period of September 2007 to August 2008. In other words, approximately 5% of the total calls received were from individuals asking for help for their gambling problems or for those of a loved one. Out of these crisis calls, 401 callers were referred to a counselor and 33% of these individuals made the initial call to the counselor. While the total volume of calls may indicate that many people are aware of the NMCPG hotline, the aforementioned discrepancy may indicate the need to find more effective ways to motivate callers to get help.

One way that may effectively encourage callers to seek help is to use motivational interviewing (MI) techniques. These techniques were designed to explore people's ambivalence about getting help and to increase their motivation to change their maladaptive behaviors (Miller & Rollnick, 1991). Hodgins and his colleagues (2004) specifically studied MI with problem gamblers. They examined the outcomes between gamblers who received an MI phone intervention + workbook v. those who only received a workbook. The gamblers who received the combined MI phone intervention and workbook gambled less frequently and spent less money on gambling than those in the workbook only condition. Moreover, the gains made by the former group were maintained at the 24-month follow-up evaluation. Thus, MI is a brief intervention that can be used feasibly and effectively in a telephone format with problem gamblers. Because several callers to the NMCPG hotline may be ambivalent about getting help, an intervention such as MI that increases their motivation to contact treatment providers may be useful.

References

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