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For the past two years, staff at The Donwood Problem Gambling Program in Toronto, Canada, have been collecting gambling-related information* from substance abuse clients in all programs. The data collection instruments include 1) the South Oaks Gambling Screen (SOGS) to measure lifetime gambling behavior, 2) an instrument that explores current (i.e., past year) gambling behavior, and, more recently, 3) six questions about Stages of Change**. The stage of change was identified by asking respondents to choose from the following six statements the one that best applied to them "right now:" a) I had a gambling problem more than six months ago but it is no longer a problem, b) I have begun to make changes to resolve my gambling problems within the last six months, c) I have made a decision to deal with my gambling problems and I am preparing to take action, d) I am considering changing my gambling behaviors, e) I have no intention of changing my gambling behaviors, and f) I do not gamble. Of the 82 clients who responded to the stage change questions, 51% selected the statement "I do not gamble." However, 29 (70%) of this subgroup, those who perceived that they did not gamble, also reported in question one of the SOGS that they had participated in one or more forms of betting. Those who claimed not to gamble were most frequently involved with the lottery. Furthermore, 95.2% of this subgroup scored 2 or less on the SOGS, indicating that they did not have a gambling problem. Although this data is preliminary, this pattern may suggest that people without a serious gambling problem may not understand what gambling is or may believe that certain forms of betting are not gambling.

Sources:

*Noonan, G. (1996). [Perceptions of gambling]. Unpublished raw data;

**Prochaska, J.O., Norcross, J.C., & DiClemente, C.C. (1994). Changing for Good: A revolutionary six-stage program for overcoming bad habits and moving your life positively forward. New York: Avon Books.

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