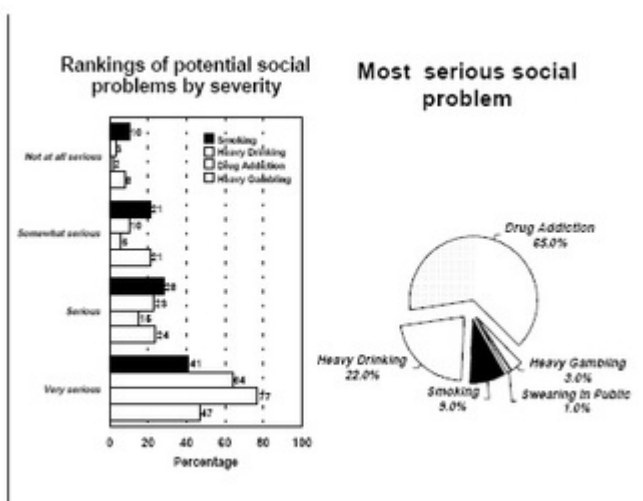


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During 1995, using random-digit dialing, researchers conducted a telephone survey of 1,030 adults in Ontario, Canada. Respondents were questioned about gambling-related problems and opinions. On one question respondents rated the severity of several behavior patterns as social problems, including smoking, heavy drinking, drug addiction, and heavy gambling. Nearly half (47%) of the respondents rated heavy gambling as a very serious social problem. However, when asked to choose the “most serious social problem”, drug addiction ranked first for 65% of the respondents, followed by heavy drinking (22%), smoking (9%), and heavy gambling (3%). An individual’s perception of a social problem is likely influenced by a host of factors. For example, these researchers examined whether the rankings of social problems were related to gambling disorders. They found that those with no gambling problems perceived heavy gambling to be more serious than those with serious gambling problems (5 or more on the SOGS and DSM-IV), who were more likely to rank heavy gambling as a less serious social problem. Other factors also influence perception, including education, personal experience, and the rating categories themselves. The phrase “drug addiction” can stimulate different images for different people; in addition, “smoking” has no indication of frequency of cigarette use, nor does “heavy” indicate the precise level of involvement in either drinking or gambling. The perception of social problems is important because communities often allocate treatment, education, and prevention resources contingent on their perception of associated harm.



Source: Ferris, J., & Stirpe, T. (1995). Gambling in Ontario: A report from a general population survey on gambling-related problems and opinions. Toronto, Ontario: Addiction Research Foundation, Problem & Compulsive Gambling Project.

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