

SOCIOPATHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF BETTING

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Abstract:

We live in a world where pursuit of material values dominates the societal value system. In such an environment social order has been constantly stressed and challenged, thus creating fertile grounds for multitude of deviant phenomena. One of the most apparent deviant phenomena in nowadays society is certainly gambling, and within it, the pretty widespread phenomenon of the so called betting. It has prospered significantly within the last decade, which can be easily observed in Macedonia as well as the so called liberal democratic countries. In this paper we will elaborate the sociopathological dimension of betting as a phenomenon closely related to or derived from gambling. We will try to answer to what extent it can be considered as a sociopathological phenomenon, what its distinctiveness from gambling is, what detrimental consequences it generates to people who bet and to the society, how the society reacts to betting, and we will give some short overview on the current situation with betting as a sociopathological phenomenon in Macedonia. Theoretically, we mainly stick to the macro sociological theories of deviance in explaining and describing betting, especially the structural-functional approach of societal anomie. Methodologically, the paper rests on comparative theoretical analysis of relevant scientific sources and studies in this filed, as well as on the usage and interpretation of relevant secondary empirical data. The authors believe that the findings of the paper will help in better differentiation between gambling and betting, elucidating of its sociopathological aspects as well as providing bases for further studies on this fairly neglected and under researched topic in social pathology.

Keywords: gambling, betting, betting shops, social pathology, Macedonia

1. INTRODUCTION

Each society has its own periods of development where deviant societal phenomena increase or decrease. Due to the very dynamics of societal relations, the societies, within the long historical periods, experience times of more significant, if not dramatic societal changes that

challenge the existing societal order. Those periods are most adequately explained within the classical sociological theory of societal anomie by Emil Durkheim and recently renewed by another prominent sociologist Zygmunt Bauman in his concept of interregnum, which basically boils down to almost the same explanation of the societal anomie (Tasheva, 1999: 271; Bauman, 2012: 49). Both conceptions, whether they are viewed within the structural-functionalist or liquid modernity theory, claim that when society experience very dramatic societal changes, societal order is under stress and tension to the point where a kind of societal vacuum emerges. This so called societal vacuum, interregnum or better known as anomie, is a fertile ground for abrupt rise of different societal deviations. Moreover, their rise is at the same time an indicator of the so called societal anomie or interregnum. When abrupt and dramatic societal changes take place, people cannot develop values, norms and behavior that fit to the newly emerging societal order. The old societal norms and values are not recognizable and shared among the people nowadays; while at the same time newly established norms and values have not yet taken their place and are not neither recognized nor shared. This creates a situation of different and in many cases deviant adaptation to this newly created societal situation or anomie. Although this is a macro sociological explanation, it is quite relevant for explaining the abrupt and sudden increase in deviant phenomena, such as sociopathological. In this sense, we will try to elucidate the current problem with betting as a kind of sociopathological phenomena which is in unprecedented rise in Macedonia, and everywhere in the so called neoliberal democratic societies.

Betting is one form of gambling, precisely, a game of chance, and as such it could be viewed, under certain conditions, as sociopathological phenomena. We all witness the everyday presence of betting phenomenon, visible through the work of the so called betting shops. Does it speak about a serious moral and value breakdown of our society? Is this an indicator of the so called ill society? Do we live in an era of societal anomie or interregnum or maybe a new societal order with new norms and values has already been established? These questions haunt the societal scientists, especially sociologists for quite a time. What is more concerning is the very subtle definition of betting, because we cannot dare to define it as sociopathological phenomenon and as gambling right away, but, only under some conditions. Nevertheless, whether viewed entirely as a sociopathological deviant phenomenon or merely as eccentric or weird behavior, it surely deserves the full scientific attention and treatment. The phenomenon is so obtrusive with grave societal consequences, that we cannot and must not neglect it or omit its presence and impact on our lives.

2. DIFFERENCES BETWEEN GAMBLING AND BETTING

Gambling is regarded as a socio-pathological phenomenon in which the game is replaced or dominated by the economic benefits that the participants in the game gain. In some ways, gambling becomes a social deviation when the participants in the game commercialize it, that is, when they insert elements that are not in the original definition of the game as a free, singled out and unproductive activity, in which, by default, the underlying causes and motives are related to fulfillment of the leisure time, entertainment, joy and socialization of the participants in the game (Špadijer Džinić, 1988: 111). Hence, we can see that gambling is in fact a kind of alienation of the game and its replacement or subjugation to some commercial (economic and financial) rules that the original game does not have (Trajkovska & Gerasimoski, 2018: 493).

In gambling, basically, it is not easy to define to what extent all gambling games are socially deviant, that is, when defining the gambling games, we must differentiate more precisely which games we are talking about. If it is undisputed that the gambling encompasses games that

are considered to constitute socio-pathological behavior and socio-pathological phenomena, then we cannot say the same about betting (Sulejmanov and Stojanovski, 2002: 249-254). Regarding betting, the dilemma is posed, whether and to what extent it is a social deviation, i.e. gambling, especially if it is practiced occasionally. Again, there are various moral dilemmas and the question of consistency in the definition of some gambling games also emerges. Thus, some gambling games are defined as socially unapproved and deviant and other gambling games (games of chance like lotto, bingo, betting, etc.) are defined as approved and normal. It should be noted that all gambling games satisfy the basic elements of the definition of gambling, i.e., those are the games that are defined as a kind of social activity in which players voluntarily participate in the mutual transfer (loss and gain) of money or some other value items which are dependent on a future uncertain event on which players cannot influence. Such games may also include the games of chance such as lotto, bingo, etc., which are allegedly games of pure luck, in which no knowledge or skill of the participants in the game is needed for success. It is of crucial importance to know that regularity of gambling on a frequent basis is in fact what defines a gambler. Someone who gambles regularly, in other words, acts consistently with the social role of a gambler (Clinard & Meier, 2011: 29).

Betting is considered as allowed game of chance (Sulejmanov, 2000: 31). There are many forms of betting, but sports betting seem to have got a swing in the last few years, both within the country and abroad. Betting is considered as a legal activity and is almost always ambivalent with its moral dimension. Irrespective of its legal support, betting has always been and probably will continue to be a morally corrupted activity, a vice, one that is regarded by the majority of people as a deviant behavior and sociopathological phenomenon. But, what really makes betting different than gambling and what makes it deviant, sociopathological phenomenon?

For the purpose of this paper we have singled out these peculiarities which we believe differentiate betting from gambling:

- Gambling usually requires higher stakes than betting;
- Participants in gambling have much less influence (or it is believed to be so) on the result of the game than those involved in betting;
- Most gamblers can be considered pathological gamblers, which could not be said for most of the betting players;
- Majority of the people bet occasionally, which means not as frequently as gamblers gamble;
- A significant number of betting players bet for fun, joy end entertainment, which is not the case in gambling, where gamblers are involved in an activity which is by far more than a game (sometimes even seen as life or death activity, such as in Russian roulette);
- Negative consequences (health, social, and economical) in gambling to a large extent exceed those of betting.

Gambling and betting fall within the so called hazardous human activities (Sulejmanov, 2003: 768). Those are the activities that make people experience unusual joy, entertainment, and thrill since they are trying to predict future outcomes of the game. Stephen Lyng is right when saying that gambling games and betting as part of them, give the players feelings of utter experience and pleasure derived from voluntary risk-taking, something in-between the thrill of the game and deviance, very similar to the feeling found in the so called edgework activities (like extreme sports for instance) (Lyng, 1990: 851-886). It means that the very nature of gambling and betting is ambivalent. They are an acts of freedom and unrestrainedness, but at the same time are always close to be defined as crossing the barrier of the socially allowed and considered at least

eccentric, if not deviant. This is much more evident in betting, which more often falls into the category of eccentric than deviant. So, when betting and sports betting as a sub-phenomenon of betting are to be considered as normal (including eccentric) and when are deemed as deviant?

There are, as always when betting is concerned, contradictory stances about whether it is a normal or deviant behavior. Speaking of sociopathological aspects, many believe that there is nothing wrong in betting since many of the betting players (sports betting players in particular) do not bet as frequently as real gamblers do and do not play on high stakes. Moreover, they believe that betting involves joy, entertainment and fun as well as some form of socializing activity in betting shops, so they find nothing especially wrong with that. Among the reasons for justifying betting they usually state that betting is a widespread societal phenomenon which is also legally allowed. On the other hand, even for most of the proponents of betting, it is almost indisputable that betting is to be considered a deviant or sociopathological phenomenon as long as betting players bet frequently and on high stakes as well as if they neglect family, lack social responsibility and weaken the relations with “the significant others” (relatives, colleagues, friends, etc.) (Flood, 2000: 6; Bloch, 1951: 215). People involved in gambling, including those in betting, neglect the obligations towards work, family and society. They become absent in the workplace, ineffective, impoverish the family, and lose the social reputation and normal communications with the social environment (Arnaudovski and Velkova, 2017: 415).

Also for the betting players, a social environment of the betting shops is not the one for socialization, joy, fun and entertainment, since they are submerged into the game itself. This supports the negative notion of betting subculture viewed as deviant subculture. This deviant betting subculture does not help socialize, but on the contrary, it helps people alienate one from each other since they are preoccupied with the outcome of the game, not with the socializing aspect. Therefore, we can conclude that only part of the betting players are to be considered as deviant, but what is really deviant in betting itself is the fact that it neglects or underestimates the value of labor and makes the people (especially young) believe that easy money is possible to get and that it is not so important to work, especially not so hard, in order to get something and succeed in life. In a certain sense, the contemporary society has become too passive and receptively oriented, as once almost prophetically said Erich Fromm (From, 1980: 187). Also, the last, but not the least important, betting defined as deviant and sociopathological behavior can often be related to other sociopathological phenomena, notably to alcoholism and vagrancy, as well as to some forms of crime, especially proprietary crime (Brlas, 2011: 180; Milosavljević, 2003: 223).

3. BETTING AS A SOCIOPATHOLOGICAL PHENOMENON

We live in a globalized and postmodern world. The traits of this new socio-cultural order are present in our everyday life and are so obtrusive that no one could escape from them or neglect them even if someone would intend to do so. Some of the globalized and postmodern phenomena are morally challenging and close to what is defined as deviation. Namely, the globalized world has enabled instant communication and sharing of the news, fashions, fads, norms and values throughout the world, irrespective of whether they are considered to be socially and culturally acceptable or not. On the other hand, the postmodernism assures us of the goodness of the core value of our world, the value of freedom, especially individual freedom, practiced as unrestrained as possible. When individuals find themselves in a situation where they are left to a so-called sphere of individuality and almost limitless freedom, they immediately fall prey to the forces of the postmodern and globalized consumption society which offer to them numerous ways of alleviation from the unbearable burden of loneliness and also a vast number of possible ways of

escaping from the ballast of limitless choice which limitless freedom creates. The choice, which is usually associated with the idea of freedom and responsibility, becomes a fate. We all live this strange paradox. One of the mechanisms to resolve this is through conformity, which is one of the ways of escaping freedom (Fromm, 2015: 139). Erich Fromm long ago warned that “our civilization offers many possibilities which intentionally help people not to be aware of the loneliness” (Fromm, 2011: 81). The phenomenon of gambling and the closely related and derived phenomenon of betting could easily be recognized as such in the previous statement by Fromm. An activity with an obviously lonely, greedy and selfish nature, since it is related to getting money or other benefits, is being masked under some socially valued activity practiced through joy, entertainment, and fun.

According to the concept of conformity, any thought and behavior that matches the societal norms agreed upon by the majority of people is considered a normal societal thought and behavior. The very concept of conformity defines societal normality simply by the fact of adoption of a certain thought and behavior by the majority of people in the society. So, irrespective of some other attributes that could be taken into consideration when defining societal standards of thought and behavior (such as good, useful or societal physical existent), the very fact that some societal standard is taken as normal by conformity defines the normal and deviant thinking and acting. Thus, paradoxically, we can observe that gambling and betting nowadays are defined as normal societal behavior (not moral or valuable by other criteria), simply by the fact that the majority of people either practice some form of gambling or betting or some of them have understanding or even approval of them. That is how the societal stance towards gambling and betting finds itself problematic even at the level of definition. That is why we have to give some socio-cultural criteria with high relative irrefutability by which we could define betting as a deviant societal phenomenon, despite the fact of its widespread societal presence and even significant legal approval.

Sadly, we are living at a time when there is an unprecedented rise in gambling, but generally also in gambling games. In our environment, a great rise in the games of chance can be noticed, out of which sports betting came to be most common. Particularly worrying is that a growing number of people are engaged in gambling, many of them being young people. The number of newly opened casinos and betting shops throughout the country is a direct support to this conclusion. In Skopje, Bitola, and other big cities in Macedonia all over the apartment buildings, almost every few hundred meters you can see a sports betting shop or a casino. When a new building has been finished, you would first see a betting shop opening rather than a grocery store. In all betting shops there are people in any part of the day. Everyone is "busy" by filling in tickets or gazing in television screens, on which they enthusiastically follow the sports competitions. It seems like everyone in the betting shop is entirely plunged into this activity, in a kind of a unique betting subculture, in a one of a kind world that enables those who bet to escape, be it only for a moment, from a cruel and unpleasant everyday life which reminds them of all the miseries. Almost every sport in the newsletters is available for betting. In a situation when Macedonia has the highest unemployment rate among young people compared to other countries in Europe, and when one quarter of all the population is unemployed, sports betting and gambling have ceased to be a mere entertainment and hobby.

A study done by the Center for Research and Policy Making in Skopje claims that sports betting in Macedonia first appeared in 1999 and, by now, many citizens throughout the country bet on, as well as that the sports betting has turned into a "national euphoria" (Center for Research and Policy Making, 2006: 3; Toevski, 2014). How much Macedonians want to bet on, speaks the very fact that in 2017 the turnover of the three largest chains of betting shops grew by 20 %, and

they together had revenues that were slightly lower than the revenues of the two largest supermarket chains. Given that a significantly lower number of people are betting compared to the total number of people shopping in the markets, it turns out that betting is an "indispensable need". No matter how paradoxically it sounds, this clearly indicates that betting is, after eating, the second existential need of the Macedonian population (Faktor MK, 2018).

Also, according to the data presented by the Association of Sports Betting Shops of Macedonia (ASOM) for 2018, the industry for organizing games of chance contributed in the national and local budgets of Macedonia with stunning 253 million Euros (a quarter billion Euros). Thus, this branch participates with 4% in the GDP of the country and employs 7 700 people. This association states that 46% of the population bets, which is almost unbelievable (Infomaks MK, 2019). The latest report for 2018 issued by this Association also presents even more astonishing facts that speak of the economic dimension of this phenomenon, as well as of the so called "social responsibility" of the entities that work in this business, like some donations and involvement in socially useful activities. Nonetheless, the Association does not mention a word of other impacts of this phenomenon like health consequences and economic costs that society suffers from those who have disrupted social and family relations as a result of betting. No one even mentions the moral aspects which are probably most essential for this phenomenon. Other studies also support the thesis that, when it comes to betting, there is no discrimination on ethnic basis, meaning that all national entities in Macedonia bet on (Macedonians, Albanians, Serbs, Turkish, Roma, etc.). As far as the educational and economic level is concerned, most participants in betting are with elementary and secondary education or 62%, as well as with a relatively low income (Anastasovski, 2014: 4, 6).

4. SOCIETAL REACTION TO BETTING

The societal reaction, in general, is aimed at self-protection of the societal order through establishing and supporting of behavior that convenes the societal order, while minimizing, controlling and neutralizing the behavior that challenges the existing societal order (Gilinskiy, 2004: 202). The essence of the societal reaction is to make individuals and societal groups respect the established societal norms and values, to control them and direct them towards the socially acceptable way of behavior (Spaseski, Aslimoski, Bachanovic, 2011: 35).

When it comes to societal reaction, control and prevention of betting, it seems that ambivalence stands out as dominant approach. What we understand under ambivalence is in fact the mixed, opposite societal relation based on informal and formal sanctioning. Thus, under ambivalence as a social reaction to betting, we generally understand a denouncing and intolerance towards betting through informal social reaction and control, above all from a moral point of view, while at the same time toleration and even positive sanction by formal social control, that is, legalization as a game of chance. It seems that this ambivalent attitude of contemporary societies to gambling and betting in particular can be also encountered in some other types of social deviations, such as smoking dependence (nicotinomania), and partly in alcohol dependence (alcoholism).

The boundary between betting as a game and as a sociopathological phenomenon is very porous. The world of betting creates moral, social, cultural and other harms at the micro sociological and macro sociological level. Under the cover of the game and the enviable financial effects that this game gives to the community, there is a serious erosion of culture and morality in the community. Concerning societal reaction and prevention of betting, we will apply here the three level approaches (general, special and individual).

At the first level we consider the general societal reaction and prevention. It can be seen in the existence of a stable economic system, the well-being of the population, low level of poverty, employment opportunities, absence of major economic and financial crises all the way to the absence of major social disorders such as anomie, alienation, etc. In the opposite situation, when these socio-structural and macroeconomic unfavorable factors are present, such as abrupt and rapid socio-economic changes and distortion of the societal values system, as they are currently present in Macedonia, it is quite realistic what happens with betting, that is, its constant presence, even as some kind of a style and a way of life for a particular part of the population. For these reasons, the prevention of betting as a socio-pathological phenomenon must be given a central attention, in particular, the upgrading of the overall living conditions and the perspective of people, creating a society in which everyone will live by their own labor, and betting will be only one form of playing, entertainment and fun, and not one of the alleged sources of existence or an alternative way of filling the shortcut of funds in the personal or family budget. In addition to the economic well-being, the influence of the socializing environment, which will direct the young person towards the adoption of the values through which the foundation of a person is expressed, will be of great importance. In particular, embedding labor as a crucial societal value to younger generations is a must within the broader process of socialization.

The special prevention covers a wide range of measures and activities by which state institutions and the civil sector create conditions for the existence of betting in normal social frames, such as play, entertainment, and the like. It is important to emphasize the need to strengthen the preventive component in the organization and functioning of the betting shops. The purpose of these measures is to establish standards in organizational, technical, spatial, social, economic, and other standards and constraints that will guarantee a high degree of prevention and will eliminate the pathways that could turn betting to a sociopathological phenomenon. Observed by the number of betting shops and their pronounced prevalence through the most attractive locations in the populated areas, according to the number of betting players, betting stakes and other parameters, we can freely emphasize that we have uncontrolled and oversized development of a betting society. In addition, so far, the state and society have not been ready to clearly and unequivocally detect the moral, cultural and other deviations that arise and appropriately respond to the socio-pathological content of the betting. In this regard, the state has an obligation to define not only the positive financial gains from the betting, but primarily the deviant influence on the moral and socio-cultural aspects of life, undermining the existence, work, financial standing, health, normal communications and interactions with the environment, and similar. The state is expected to adopt a more rigid legislation and control by redefining licensing policies, spatial dislocation of betting shops, and, to a lesser extent, establishing other ways to limit the availability of betting, etc. In this regard, the civilian initiative for displacing betting shops at a certain distance from the settlements and schools deserves attention in order to reduce the availability of the betting centers and to eliminate them as a content in the urban environment.

In terms of individual societal reaction and prevention, it is a great responsibility and care of the state to protect individuals who, due to their unfavorable socio-economic position and other characteristics, are predisposed to become victims of betting. Nothing less important is the responsibility of the institutions towards those citizens who have already been swallowed by this "game of chance". It should be noted that regarding protection, the betting shops should give advice to the betters for responsible betting, in the sense not to gamble under the influence of alcohol, to limit the means by which they bet, to make occasional breaks and other tips. In doing so, they should not fail to emphasize that players of sports betting, casinos, and other games of chance should play moderately in terms of entertainment, and warn them that the continued

participation in the games of chance could result to betting dependency for a certain small group of betting players. Also, although advertising the games of chance is forbidden by law, it seems that such a ban has been successfully compensated by striking luminous ads that attract attention in the urban environment.

5. CONCLUSION

In our concluding observations, we want to emphasize that betting in our social reality is:

- A phenomenon that has exceeded the limits of normality, according to the range of people very massive and according to the consequences it causes to a great extent destructive, with visible detrimental consequences on the whole of the cultural value system;
- An occurrence that, despite being manifested massively, is not adequately “visible” to the state in societal and moral sense, which results in an inadequate and ambivalent social relation to betting;
- In unstable societal and economic circumstances, like in a situation of societal anomie, betting takes on the character of a deviant adaptation to the new unfavorable social reality;
- As a phenomenon that is often at the boundary between the game and addiction, between normal and sociopathological, betting reflects the key socio-economic changes in the society and appears as a form of cultural deviation that causes serious consequences that are primarily of societal and cultural significance, but also of health and economic nature;
- Betting is more prevalent in the materially, socially and culturally most vulnerable social communities, frequently expressed as a form of deviant subculture;
- Addiction to betting could become catastrophic, contributing to the growth of crime and the destruction of the family, friendship, and professional relationships;
- The possibilities for social prevention and control of betting cannot be reduced solely to the legal measures for prohibition, for this sociopathological phenomenon requires more integrated approaches based on economic diversity, job creation, legal (including territorial) constraints of betting, increased control over betting organizers and new social policies and measures;
- The government (both at central and local level) is expected to manifest a greater interest and responsibility in eliminating the socio-pathological consequences arising from the uncontrolled increase in betting, since the results of available research in this field have shown that civilian sector has proved to be more sensitive than the state and that strict regulatory measures must take place at home, as they have already been successfully taken and implemented in many countries around the world (Galich Anatoljevich, 2006);
- It seems that the most important thing is that betting in our social reality should not be valued and treated only as a game of chance, but to be understood and treated within a new and more sensitive understanding as subtle societal phenomenon, which could range from eccentric to deviant and sociopathological phenomenon and be an indicator of much deeper societal disorganizations.

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