

Gambling behind bars: does prison provide ideal conditions?

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Abstract

While studies exist on the gambling habits of the correctional population prior to incarceration, little information exists on gambling habits during imprisonment. This article aims to describe gambling practices in Quebec prisons. The impact of prison life on these activities and their meaning will be analyzed, relying on semi-structured interviews with 51 men currently detained in three federal penitentiaries in Quebec. Contrary to our expectations, the regulations prohibiting gambling in Correctional Service of Canada institutions do not present a central obstacle to this practice. In fact, participation in gambling is limited more by elements connected to the detention institution and the sentence. The availability of certain games, more particularly card games such as poker, as well as the pleasure resulting from those games seem considerably limited in comparison with group bets like sports pools.

Résumé

Bien que des études existent sur les habitudes de jeu de la population carcérale avant incarcération, on a peu d'information sur les habitudes de jeu pendant l'emprisonnement. Le présent article vise à décrire les pratiques de jeu dans les prisons du Québec. On analysera l'impact de la vie en prison sur ces activités et leur signification en s'appuyant sur des entrevues semi-structurées avec 51 hommes actuellement détenus dans trois établissements pénitentiaires fédéraux au Québec. Contrairement à ce que nous nous attendions de trouver, la réglementation interdisant le jeu dans les établissements de Service correctionnel du Canada ne présente pas un obstacle majeur à cette pratique. En fait, la participation au jeu est davantage limitée par des éléments liés à l'établissement de détention et à la peine. Certains jeux dont disposent les détenus, plus particulièrement les jeux de cartes tels que le poker, ainsi que le plaisir qui en résulte semblent considérablement limités par rapport aux paris sportifs effectués en groupes.

Introduction

Several researchers have been interested in the gambling habits of prison populations prior to incarceration, as well as in the links between gambling and criminal behaviour (see, e.g., Abbott, McKenna & Giles, 2005; Ashcroft, Daniel & Hart, 2004; Jarvis, 1988; Lahn, 2005; Nixon, Leigh & Nowatzki, 2006; Templer, Kaiser & Siscoe, 1993). Conversely, very few studies have been published regarding gambling by prisoners while in detention, and such studies have been limited particularly to the prevalence of gambling in prison, the types of games found or the types of stakes involved (Abbott, McKenna & Giles, 2005; Lahn & Grabosky, 2003; Turner, Preston, McAvoy & Gillam, 2013; Williams & Hinton, 2006; Williams, Royston & Hagen, 2005). We know little about what these games mean to the offenders, how they are played or what their limits might be. This information is nevertheless essential for a better understanding of the influence of the prison environment on gambling and possibly for optimal intervention.

Based on interviews with male offenders in three federal penitentiaries in Quebec, as well as with social program officers (SPO), the current article will explain gambling practices in these institutions and their influencing factors. These data will contribute to a better understanding of the impact of prison settings on the significance of gambling and, if applicable, the elements limiting its prevalence.¹

The issue

What is prison? To describe the concept of *prison* accurately, as complex as the entity may be, it is important to consider three components: the execution of the sentence, the organizational system and the sociological space. First and foremost, prison sentences cut offenders off from their former lives. People found guilty of a criminal offense are removed from free society and face isolation that causes them to lose their common points of reference (Poulalion, 2004). Offenders are reluctantly separated from their family, their circle of friends, their belongings and any element that connects them with their previous life in society. That being said, the experience is obviously painful and frustrating, given the loss of emotional relationships, the solitude and the boredom. Sykes (1958) adds that this deliberate rejection by society deepens the pain.

Prison is also an organizational system intended for the administration and execution of the prison sentence. One of the mandates of prison is based on protecting society and maintaining the internal safety of the institution, which means controlling the prison population. Each movement of the prisoners is preauthorized and monitored, including movement to and from workshops, the workplace, the laundry and family visits (Combessie, 2000). According to

¹Opinions expressed in this current article are those of the authors, and do not necessarily represent the views of the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC).

Chantraine (2004), this excessive supervision subjects the inmate population to a compulsory routine since prisoners are told when to rise, eat, work, play and sleep. The offenders interviewed as part of his study describe the typical dullness of the prison environment as “robotization” of the prison population, caused by repeating the same acts at the same time every day. The prisoners must strictly follow a daily routine set by an extremely rigid organizational system.

Of course, these characteristics are not exclusive to correctional institutions. They are also particular to psychiatric hospitals or to residential care facilities for people with limited mobility. Fixed schedules cannot be individually adapted but they are essential for keeping an institution running smoothly (Goffman, 1968). However, offenders are in prison for having been found guilty of committing an illegal act, not by force of circumstances further to health problems. We can imagine that services offered in prison are not received by prisoners the same way that health services are received by elderly patients in residential care facilities.

Finally, since prison is a restricted physical space, some offenders assimilate an informal system, translated by a series of implicit standards shared by part of the population integrated into the prison subculture. Frequently against official prison regulations, they dictate appropriate prison behaviour with peers and with prison staff. Sykes (1958) explains the internalization of these values and behaviours in the “inmate code.” Prisoners who are fully involved in prison society seem more likely than others to become involved in intramural trade, that is, trafficking anything that has value in prison (Michel, 2006). These include those objects which can be used as weapons, as well as drugs, moonshine, non-prescription medication, property stolen from other prisoners (clothes, radio, television), non-institutional food (usually sold at the prison canteen) or pornography (Kalinich, 1980).

From this description, we can imagine that the prison environment would be conducive to gambling. It is easy to see how the isolation and boredom created by being cut off from one’s previous life and the monotony of prison routine could encourage these recreational activities. In fact, we can think of gambling as the perfect alternative for adding a little excitement to an everyday life steeped in routine, or an instant pleasure that could help inmates temporarily forget their captive situation. Furthermore, Cusson (2005, 2006) explains that for some serious offenders, a disproportionate part of their lives is reserved for partying and risky behaviour, including alcohol and drug use, and gambling. In his autobiography, Beauvoir Jean describes nights at the casino and the multiple lottery tickets purchased by the pimps and gang members he knew (Tremblay, 2011). Continuing this deviant lifestyle in prison increases the risk of involvement in internal trafficking as a mean of raising the necessary funds required for potential gambling, which seems to form part of the prison subculture. That being said, the previous elements lead us to believe that prison is conducive to gambling among its population. It appears, however, that for a better understanding of gambling in prison, its meaning and how it is carried out, other elements must be considered. In fact, this

understanding has now been determined, and was revealed through interviews conducted with male offenders. The discoveries yielded through these interviews will be presented in the following sections.

Whether or not prison creates a favourable environment for gambling, studies on the subject reveal that the activity is not widespread throughout the population. Prevalence rates of gambling in prison vary greatly, with differences of up to almost 40% from one study to another. Lahn and Grabosky (2003), of Australia, report that 60% of prisoners indulge in gambling, mostly bets on televised sports matches. The government of Queensland, Australia, revealed in 2002 that 46% of prisoners bet on “just about anything,” to use their words (Williams, Royston & Hagen, 2005). In New Zealand, Abbott, McKenna and Giles (2005) put the rate at 26%, with cards being the most popular game. Finally, in Canada, Turner and his colleagues (2013) report that 44% of the offenders admitted to gambling while in prison and that 34% reported gambling at the time. Card games are the most common, followed by sports bets. This significant variation can be attributed to the size of the sample (representative or not), the characteristics of the population studied (male and female, accused and detained), or the period under study (last six months or lifelong). However, none of these studies describes exactly what we mean by “gambling.” For example, what does “various bets” or “to bet on anything” mean? Could it be that the authors who adopted a broader definition of gambling obtained higher prevalence rates, as was the case notably with the Australian researchers? This article aims at a better understanding of gambling inside detention facilities.

Method

Our study is based on a qualitative approach, relying on semi-structured interviews with men under the responsibility of the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC). One institution of each security level was visited (to ensure the confidentiality of the inmates who participated in our study, the exact location of the selected facilities will not be revealed in this paper). All offenders incarcerated in federal correctional facilities received an initial security classification—minimum, medium or maximum—according to the level of supervision and control that is necessary to protect the public, the correctional staff and other offenders. This security level is reassessed at least every year. Most offenders who have made progress within the prison will finish their sentence in a minimum security level institution where they could benefit from more privileges and have more freedom. The choice aims to diversify the sample and to move closer to the reality of gambling in prison. There is reason to believe, given that these characteristics vary according to the security level, that the level in question will influence gambling habits. It will do so by affecting 1) the variations in “free” time granted to offenders outside formal activities (work, study programs, psychosocial services); 2) time served since the beginning of the sentence and months remaining until release; and 3) the behaviour of offenders

according to their history of institutional incidents as well as their propensity for violence.

At each institution, a CSC-appointed staff member acted as intermediary between the interviewer and the prison population. With his help, information on the study was provided to offenders verbally or through posters. The interviewer met with parole officers (PO) and offenders representing their respective cellblocks and encouraged them to promote the study to the prison population. The PO or the cell block representatives were responsible for informing the offenders about the study and for referring them to the CSC-appointed staff member should they wish to take part. This approach ensured that no one felt compelled to participate. Furthermore, the study was aimed at all leisure activities and not limited to gambling, which meant that participants were not identified as gamblers or did not have to identify themselves as gamblers to take part. Offenders who wished to participate in the study were required to understand and speak French regardless of their mother tongue.

Since a qualitative method was used, obtaining a representative sample of the federal prison population was not required. As the purpose was not to generalize the data, but rather to gain a better understanding of gambling practices in prison, the number of interviews was determined according to the saturation principle. To ensure that all relevant elements were collected interviews were conducted in various cellblocks at each institution. Generally, after about 15 interviews of approximately 80 minutes with offenders in the same penitentiary, no new additional information was obtained. The number of interviews therefore stopped at 51. One interview with an SPO was conducted at each of the facilities visited, to inquire about the operations of the institution in question and the activities offered.

At the beginning of each interview, the interviewer explained to the participants that she was not a CSC staff member and that she did not have access to inmates' files. She insisted on the confidentiality of the information that was about to be collected. The starting point was the question, "What did you do with your spare time before your detention?" The question pertained to leisure activities in general, and served to establish a trust between the interviewer and the offenders prior to approaching the issue of gambling in prison, which is a prohibited activity. If not raised initially, themes related to gambling contexts before and during incarceration were suggested, such as the games most commonly played, the amount of the wagers and bets, and the motivations for gambling. Finally, a data sheet was completed to track each participant's prison trajectory and to collect sociodemographic information.

As the data were collected and recorded, a professional re-transcribed the interviews. The interviewer re-read all the transcripts while simultaneously listening to the corresponding interview to ensure accuracy. All participants received a fictitious name to guarantee confidentiality, and all elements that could identify them were disguised. The results were analyzed with NVivo data processing software. A coding

tree was created from the main themes raised during the interviews, such as the types of games, the bets, and the limitations for participation. The research team counterchecked the coding of the first interviews to validate the interpretation of the themes under study. For the purposes of this article, all interviews excerpts contained within have been translated from French into English.

The method had three main limitations. First, it did not specifically establish the prevalence of gambling in federal prisons. The types of games and their popularity were based only on the opinion of detainees interviewed. Second, penitentiary authorities did not allow the interviewer to spend time in each unit to observe gambling activities and to create a prolonged engagement with the interviewees. Her rapport with the offenders was limited to interviews. Third, the findings did not apply to those provincial offenders in Quebec who are serving sentences of less than two years, or to any other correctional population elsewhere in the world. However, the study nonetheless provided important and useful information on the subject.

Results

Structured time

Whether or not they are familiar with prison life, offenders need some time to recreate a new lifestyle, which is more or less temporary, depending on the length of the sentence. The structured and restricted prison environment creates stress and boredom (Poulalion, 2004), so inmates must develop new landmarks based on working hours, canteen day, favourite television programs or family visits (Marchetti, 2001). Gaston, an SPO interviewed as part of our study, explains clearly how this new lifestyle is created. Offenders become involved in various intramural activities at their own individual pace, with the aim of forging a place for themselves in prison. Gradually, they ease themselves out of their former life.

[...] It's the time to adapt and find your place. You know, at some point the guys create a life inside. There are those who always have a hard time with it. Of course the guys, when they aren't feeling great, they are more likely to call their spouse, their this, their that [...]. But when they're doing ok, they have their buddies to hang out with, for activities, they plan things. The guys, at some point, they'll call her once a week, you know? (Gaston, SPO, medium-security prison)

Eventually, offenders create a life inside prison, from activities which are either (1) authorized, supervised and provided by the corrections service such as programs, professional follow-ups, support groups, sports, board games (e.g., chess, Monopoly, backgammon, checkers and cribbage) and other leisure activities, or (2) unauthorized, introduced by offenders and against prison regulations, such as drug use, homemade alcohol or non-prescription medication, the sale of items, contraband or otherwise, among the prison population, and gambling. The

Corrections and Conditional Release Act (CCRA) stipulates in article 40(q) that inmates who engage in gambling are committing a disciplinary offense. Depending on the seriousness of the offense and the surrounding circumstances, the warden may impose a punishment on the offender ranging from a warning to placement in segregation (this information is available on the official web site of the Correctional Service of Canada at: www.csc-scc.gc.ca/).

To start with, the manner in which a person in prison spends his time depends much not only on him—specifically, his interests and personality—but also on the prison environment. First, there are significant differences according to the security level. In high-surveillance prisons, offenders are allowed only one hour a day in the exterior courtyard or gym, contrary to minimum-security prisons, where offenders have more freedom of movement from the time their cells open until curfew. That being said, the level of participation in gambling seems higher in maximum- and medium-security prisons than in minimum-security ones, where there is more free time. The frequency and the amount of the stakes increase with control. The offenders interviewed said that the prison population is less concerned with following the rules in high-surveillance prisons and that the guards intervene very little to stop the betting.

Intervention by the guards also depends on the amount of the wager. Dominique, who has experienced all security levels and is serving his 38th year in detention, and Vincent, serving his 10th prison sentence, perfectly understand the reality of these environments. Although several offenders close to their release follow the regulations in minimum-security institutions, the guards do not automatically interrupt small-stake card games.

Well, they ask to see what you're up to, what games you're playing and if you were not playing for money because, at least here [in minimum], it's not the same as in medium or maximum, because in medium you can play. You have chips on the table, the screws don't give a damn, you know, they don't get involved...but here, it's not the same. [...] Because here, you've got one foot out the door, one foot inside. So, if you manage here, maybe if you're good, you'll get out, but if not, you go back. That's how it works here. (Dominique, interviewed in a minimum-security prison, incarcerated since 1972²)

Yeah. It's not all that serious. It's that even here in minimum...there, whatever people play, there can be four sitting around the table and then suddenly there are four cans of Pepsi [a soft drink] on the corner, it doesn't attract any attention...they put the four Pepsis and that's what we bet, and we don't worry about the guards or the authorities...why? Because it's not a big deal. Yeah. We won't put 4.2 of pot on the table, but the four soft drinks, we will put them...and yeah, we decided that we were betting, that we were each betting

²The date of incarceration excludes pre-sentencing confinement, if applicable, with the purpose of focusing on the federal experience.

one soft drink. And the guard will pass by; he won't say anything. (Vincent, minimum, incarcerated since 2006)

Second, the services and material available also influence the selection of leisure activities. In the interviews, offenders and SPOs noted considerable differences between penitentiaries regarding the size of the gymnasiums and exterior courtyards, the availability and quality of the sports equipment and the variety of activities offered, regardless of the security level. Aguilar and Asmussen (1989) attribute the idleness of the prison population notably to the reduced availability of services, equipment or all types of leisure activities. In situations where equipment is in short supply, offenders tend to become more involved in passive and sedentary activities such as watching television or reading in their cells.

Moreover, some participants in this study even asserted that the lack of opportunities for leisure activities at their institution led them either to participate or to increase their participation in illicit activities, such as drug use or gambling. Benoît denounces the “excessive amount of spare time to fill” after work or school, which he considers a facilitator of gambling. He wants to run for president of the inmate committee, notably to improve leisure activities for prisoners.

So our job is done, so then, there's a long way to go, you know. What do you do? Either you go to bed, or go eat, or go work out, you know you can go train. Once you've done all that? But you know, at some point, you have to stop; you need to do something else. So maybe you go play cards, play...you know? There are no activities, not a lot of activities there. (Benoît, minimum, incarcerated since 2009)

The inmates interviewed by McEvoy and Spirgen (2011) also believed that gambling in prison would be less popular if there were more recreational programs to occupy their spare time constructively. It seems that gambling is often considered by inmates as a leisure activity, providing similar benefits such as freedom, fun and adventure (Williams, 2008).

We can wonder, however, if the lack of recreational activities offered in prisons is the sole factor encouraging offenders to engage in illicit activities such as gambling. According to Frey and Delaney (1996), all inmates do not participate in leisure activities, despite the presence of several opportunities. If they do, they choose more passive activities such as reading a book or watching television. In addition, offenders may find it difficult to occupy their spare time with activities that provide intellectual and protracted satisfaction, rather than those providing immediate and intense gratification. Clemmer (1940/1958) observed that prisoners often lack interest and motivation, and few are able to appreciate long-term activities. Prior to incarceration, a large proportion of them had deviant lifestyles and exhibited a penchant for constant adventure and excitement. In this regard, Williams, Walker and Streaan (2005) emphasize the importance of changing offenders' habits to find an

alternative to drug and alcohol use, while taking into account their needs, such as sensation seeking otherwise filled by crime.

Gambling behind bars

Consistent with the offenders' interest in sports, sports betting emerged as the most reported activity by participants. Because our study is qualitative this does nothing to establish a scientifically valid prevalence rate, but suffice it to say that our results show that this sort of gambling is quite frequent among offenders. Our findings are similar to those of McEvoy and Spirgen (2011) who performed a qualitative study on men incarcerated in two medium security prisons in Ohio (United States). However, our findings are also different from the ones obtained by Turner and his colleagues (2009, 2013) in two quantitative studies on federal prison populations in Ontario (Canada). Those findings reveal that card games were the most common form of gambling in correctional facilities. Perhaps this difference can be explained by cultural issues, but it is also certainly a question of method. Sports bets take several forms, and an interview methodology has likely given the opportunity to offenders to discuss all types of sports betting, not just pools. For example, the most active offenders who engage in gambling will bet on their own sports performance within the prison, or the performance of their team, or the performance of one player compared to another. The wager adds an element of thrill to ice and ball hockey, tennis, badminton or football matches. When a majority of participants agree to bet, they all have to contribute, usually staking one or two soft drinks. Those offenders who are less interested in betting are sometime forced to do the same, or risk not being allowed to join the game. This exclusion is often the price to pay to participate in these games.

On other occasions, offenders bet on the sports performance of their peers and participate in the prison sporting game only as spectators. This type of betting is not pleasant for all. Those prisoners who only want to have fun may feel the pressure, whether intentional or not, from the wagerers, which adds an unwanted element of seriousness to the game. After 15 years behind bars, Gérald, 39, is among those offenders who do not like bets on their sports performance.

[...] It's like in hockey, that's why I don't get involved, because some will bet. Some will bet but won't play, so [...] They go bet. Then, they'll have set up their team, but I don't know about it. It's all done without our knowledge. Sometimes, those small wagers cause a bit of friction. (Gérald, medium, incarcerated since 1995)

Yet Gérald is not opposed to sports betting, though he much prefers to bet on professional leagues rather than on his own performance, which puts some distance between him and the bet.

Sure, for hockey games on TV, we all make small bets, we all have hockey pools. (Gérald, medium, incarcerated since 1995)

Bets on professional leagues usually involve not only televised hockey games but also American and European football matches. Depending on the organizers, bets can be large-scale, sometimes involving up to one hundred bettors. Some offenders specialize in bookmaking and actively collect wagers from a large proportion of inmates throughout the institution. Kalinich (1980) explains that, generally, these group bets or pools are common in prisons because, although they require a certain amount of organization, they can also take place anywhere in the institution and do not require much equipment. It thus becomes easy for prisoners to place their bets in the courtyard, the cellblock, the dining room, the workplace, the chapel, etc. These gambling networks would enable some inmates to accumulate large sums of money or property (Kalinich, 1980). However, a few of the offenders interviewed in our study revealed that bookmaking on this scale is not easy. All of them eventually abandoned this practice after too many problems with bettors refusing or being unable to pay, or with participants dissatisfied with the organization. Mathieu, age 32, serving a life sentence, is no longer motivated to organize pools, preferring to stay out of trouble.

Even if there were football or hockey pools, I don't get involved anymore because it's gambling. It's an illness. And I'm the one who organized it. But I'm not interested anymore. I did it, it cost me nothing: I organized it. It is because at some point... something always happens. Someone isn't satisfied... You know, there's always a problem. In prison, there's always a problem, so I try to avoid problems. I gave it all up. (Mathieu, maximum, incarcerated since 2005)

Sports bets are popular in prison probably because of two principal reasons. First, sports bets are not expensive. Wagers are usually small and take place over a long period, sometimes several weeks, as occurs during playoffs. The value of the jackpot can reach up to fifty or even hundreds of dollars, depending on the number of participants. Second, the fact that sports betting involves a large number of participants seems to minimize individual involvement, making it less incriminating.

Yeah, hockey pools, they're not the same. It's because they go on for a long time, and it's very cheap. It can be 5 dollars, over 15 days. But with poker, it's \$5 every five minutes. It's not the same. But with that, it's a series of teams, and you choose him, him and him and it's going to cost \$5. That's not much, \$5. (Michel, maximum, incarcerated since 2009)

Although participants talked frequently about sports bets during the interviews, there is nevertheless a long list of gambling activities in prison: Monopoly, backgammon, dominoes, chess, cribbage, PlayStation tournaments (i.e., video games), and cards, especially poker. Usually, with the exception of poker, these games do not necessarily involve bets, but nonetheless several offenders will take

advantage of the opportunity to bet a few soft drinks. These games then become gambling activities, as games of skill. For example, two inmates can play an ice hockey game on the PlayStation and the one who scores the highest number of goals wins the bet. Similarly, two inmates can play war-related video game and the one who kills the highest number of enemies wins the game.

Offenders appear to have a limitless imagination when it comes to inventing new bets. At work, they engage in competitions to see who will be the first to complete a task, with the fastest winning one or two soft drinks. At the gym, offenders have weightlifting competitions with chocolate bars as the prize. In the halls, cellblocks or courtyard, offenders are often heard saying, “How much do you want to bet?”, “You want to bet?” and “Are you sure about that? I’ll bet a case of Pepsi on that!”

Charlie, age 51, claims that sometimes it seems as if his peers cannot do anything without betting on it. He has been incarcerated for eleven years in institutions of all security levels. He describes this situation clearly:

It’s good that you talk about gambling because in prison, you have to know something: in prison, the first thing I noticed, in everything, listening to people, the words “Are you game? How much do you want to bet?” You hear it ten times a day; that’s the truth. Me, at least in my row. [...] That’s it constantly, all the time, betting on something, all the time and that’s the first absurd thing I noticed about prison. (Charlie, minimum, incarcerated since 1998)

The gambling that Charlie describes seems trivial, more like challenges enhanced by a bet. These bets appear to be relatively commonplace, adding some excitement to a rather monotonous routine without requiring too much involvement from participants. They are based on daily activities, such as on reality television participant eviction or even on the release date of a co-prisoner. That form of gambling could have influenced the results of this study if the interviewer had not reiterated the definition of gambling with the offenders. A few bettors asserted, at the beginning of the interview, that they never gambled in detention, when they actually participated in daily challenges almost every time the opportunity arose. They did not consider themselves as gamblers, at least not at the same level as poker players who, they believe, bet large sums of money. This redefinition of gambling, during the interviews, as inclusive of all activities involving something at stake (money, service, objects) in turn allowed for the profitable restructuring of many interviews.

It is important to consider different types of games individually: certain types seem more accessible and frequent than do others and therefore increase artificially the frequency of gambling in detention centers. In our study, the offenders revealed that bets on small challenges between two or three detainees – for instance, on the first person to outrage the guard – happen many times per day, whereas board and card games tend to take place only on evenings and weekends. These games are not

necessarily less popular, but maybe just less frequent, or accessible to fewer persons. This perception could explain why some offenders have the impression that card games like poker are in fact not as widespread throughout the prison population. Alain explained:

Or as I was saying, here at [name of the establishment], there are not a lot of poker games. There are some, I've seen some, but not a lot, not often. (Alain, minimum, incarcerated since 2008)

Indeed, gambling in prison is not widespread throughout the entire population. In any given institution, there can be differences between sectors, even between offenders in the same cellblock. Some participants admit to gambling several times a week, whereas other offenders in the same cellblock insist that there is no gambling in their unit. There are three possible hypotheses for this discrepancy: (1) the offenders involved in gambling are very discreet and hide their bets from onlookers; (2) during the interview, some subjects chose not to reveal this practice because it is illegal; or (3) offenders who do not mingle much and who are not involved or interested in this type of activity do not pay attention to what the other offenders are doing.

The latest data confirm the existence of gambling in federal correctional facilities. There thus appears to be many different types of games, in spite of the CSC regulation prohibiting the practice. The interviews reveal that there are several other limitations to these intramural activities as well. These limitations are usually related to the institution and to the individual and also seem to alter the traditional meaning of gambling generally accepted in the larger non-incarcerated society.

Institutional limitations

The arrangement and management of the institution's internal space determine the daily life of prisoners (Elger, 2009). Their movements and resources are restricted, so they must improvise, using whatever materials are available for gambling. Because they no longer have access to state-owned games or private places for games with friends, the opportunities for betting are considerably fewer than in free society.

We saw earlier that offenders take advantage of board and card games played in common places, such as poker, dice, chess, checkers or backgammon, to lay bets on. However, certain offenders claim these rooms are not ideal locations because they are accessible to anyone who wants to hang out and talk, eat, read the newspaper, etc. This situation can hamper concentration and increase the potential for cheating. Participants interviewed suggested creating a room reserved only for board and card games, thereby reducing traffic around the game itself.

Other prisoners explained that the inappropriate setup and small size of the tables, combined with uncomfortable chairs, discourage them from becoming involved in

games in which they usually like to bet, especially poker. Moreover, in some institutions, as Rémi explains, the tables are welded to the floor and have the capacity to seat only four persons. These restrictions limit the number of players and make the game and the stakes less appealing.

It seems like the tables aren't set up for playing, at [name of the establishment]. The chairs are welded...the table has four places. You can't say, "we're going to be six or eight" there. There are no free chairs. [...] There were others who wanted to play, but there weren't enough places! We couldn't have any more players. (Rémi, maximum, incarcerated since 2008)

However, bigger tables or additional chairs do not automatically guarantee that there will be players interested in getting in on the game. Gambling in prison depends entirely on the presence of gamblers. Any wager must be inevitably made with another offender; in maximum-security institutions, this fact means he must be in the same cellblock because the population is divided. Rémi, who had the opportunity to play poker during a previous sentence, continues on this subject:

Well, it was fun, because you don't know where the time goes. [...] I would like to play here, but there are no players. There are no players! At first, there were two players. We played as three here, but it wasn't enough, it wasn't fun. You need more than that. (Rémi, maximum, incarcerated since 2008)

The presence of players varies according to the inmate population. Although certain offenders are indeed interested in gambling, it is also true that the players themselves need to be interesting to each other *as players*. Because offenders do not all share the same level of game skills and strategies, they may not enjoy playing together. Competing against better players decreases accordingly the chances of winning. Some players are more interested in having fun than making money, and perceive the competition as spoiling the fun of the game. They just enjoy sharing one or two soft drinks against chips to play cards for a few hours. Whether or not the players make gains, the important aspect is that they have fun.

Furthermore, those players who are serious about the game and enjoy the competition do not necessarily appreciate the stubbornness or insinuated accusations of their opponents, the raised voices of bad losers, or the personality clashes. We believe that this suspicion is heightened by the hostility that generally reigns among the prison population. Kay, age 62, supports this hypothesis:

You get on board, there. The... guys bet, then... Me... aside from that, it's because at some point you find yourself around people you don't feel like talking to. So, you know, there's ten-to-twelve around the table. You're in or you're not...it doesn't interest me. [...] Some of them cheat, and you see them cheating, then they say they didn't cheat. So... Everything is tricky, here. You have to be careful, you know, a fight can start quickly, and you don't know

who you're dealing with. You're better... better to stay away. (Kay, medium, incarcerated since 1998)

Correctional institutions, as closed environments, limit interpersonal contact between offenders, as well as material and monetary resources. These limitations draw criticism from some gamblers, who claim gambling in prison lacks intensity. This situation is due mainly to uninteresting bets (usually canteen products). Those inmates, who played for higher stakes prior to incarceration and those who have the means to do so, quickly lose interest. "If you're going to play for cheap junk", they argue, "what's the point?"

The modest wagers occur not only because offenders refuse to up the ante, but also because most of them simply cannot afford it. Prison inmates have two main types of legal income: (1) resources from outside, such as their own savings, family and friends, for which a maximum amount is established; and (2) jobs managed by the CSC, and paid schooling or professional training. There are various employment opportunities, such as cook, janitor or gardener, but exclusion criteria are defined according to the prisoner's history and behaviour. Correctional establishments cannot provide employment to the entire prison population, while many offenders work only part-time, and several others remain unemployed (excluding voluntary refusals to work). It should be noted that prison authorities prioritize education and encourage offenders to continue their studies. Conversely, the number of available programs decreases with the security level of the institution: maximum-security prisons generally have fewer programs available.³ Finally, there is a third income source, one which derives from illicit activities, such as trafficking in alcohol, tobacco, drugs and other items valued in prison, debt collection and enforcement, and bookmaking. However, this third source does not in fact involve the majority of the prison population.

Because of these financial limitations, offenders prefer to keep the money they have and are not overly eager to risk everything on a bet. One of the most common themes in the interviews was this limited capacity for betting, especially on poker.

At some point, we began playing poker. We played poker for soft drinks. So, I stopped because... I really liked the game but not the idea: we don't have a lot of money, and I could win 10 drinks and lose 20, then win back 15... I played for maybe two months, then I said to the guys: "Either we stop playing for drinks, and we play for fun, because I find that it isn't worth it." If I lose my canteen... forget it, it's a game but then it becomes more than a game. It doesn't appeal to me. But it's too bad because it was fun. (Bruno, minimum, incarcerated since 2009)

³This information came from an informal discussion with a corrections officer who had 15 years' experience with the Correctional Service of Canada.

In prison, there are fewer means of earning money and the salaries are considerably below minimum wage as it exists in free society. Pierre, who believes he has worked hard for little, gives more thought to how to spend his money.

In the first place, look: I work five days a week, \$5.80 a day... then I have my bonuses. Why should I work for a day to spend it on cards? It's... It's a lack of timing. It's a lack of responsibilities, somewhere in there. (Pierre, medium, incarcerated since 2009)

Several offenders who were interviewed claimed that the popularity of gambling, especially board and card games, has decreased since the 2008 smoking ban in federal penitentiaries, when cigarettes, cigars, tobacco, chewing tobacco, cigarette rollers, matches and lighters, among other items, became prohibited in CSC institutions. According to them, cigarettes encouraged gambling because all, or almost all, prisoners had cigarettes. They served as bargaining chips among the offenders, both smokers and non-smokers. Dominique, age 57, serving an aggregate sentence of almost 44 years, describes an experience from several years ago at a medium-security institution.

When we were... when we played in the cellblock, we didn't play for fun. When we played in the cellblock, we played for real... Back then, we smoked, we played for packages of cigarettes. Later, it was soft drinks, but it's quieter now because there isn't much interest in playing cards in the block. [...] I'm not going to start betting with chips and soft drinks. (Dominique, minimum, incarcerated since 1972)

Tobacco made betting more tempting, since it was useful for obtaining various items within the institution, such as food, clothes or narcotics, and was very easy to conceal in a cell. In prison, a cigarette was as convenient as a banknote. Vincent clearly explains the impact of the prohibition, using an interesting comparison with Loto-Québec, a province-owned business that manages and provides gambling in Quebec:

At first, the real question is... look, it's the same thing as outside: take all the casinos, take Loto-Québec, and they suddenly stop giving money [...]. They'll give you cookies, they'll give you chocolates, they'll give you... bikes. Well, no! It's going to decrease a lot! Well, in prison, it's the same thing. Cigarettes were the bet. They were preferred, they were what everybody really wanted lots of, you know. But now, well, without cigarettes, for sure, there is less gambling [...]. (Vincent, minimum, incarcerated since 2006)

Finally, since the inmate population lives in very close quarters, given the closed environment, the distance between winners and losers is practically non-existent in comparison with free society. Adversaries meet seven days a week and cannot avoid

running into each other. For Téo, it was infuriating to lose repeatedly to the same person and then see him every day.

I played a little there, lost 200 to 300 dollars, then after that, I said: “Look, it’s not my game.” [...] It’s a guy from here, a kid, we played all the time. At some point, I think, I owed him something like \$150, you know. Then one day he tells me: “It’s not bad with you, buddy; I don’t have to work anymore.” I answered him: “You filthy scum, you will work again because I’m not sitting at your table anymore...” (Téo, maximum, incarcerated since 2002)

All in all, the previous data suggest that the limitations attributable to the correctional institution affect mostly betting on board and card games, particularly poker, while almost none of the prisoners hinted at specific limitations for pools. The layout of the housing units, the divided inmate population, low incomes and the tobacco ban may have negatively affected betting in prison, but they have not stopped some offenders from betting considerable amounts, as seen in the last excerpt from Téo’s interview. In these cases, it was not canteen products involved, but transfers between bank accounts outside of prison, carried out by intermediaries, like friends and family members.

Personal limitations

Sometimes, games with betting can start major or minor arguments, resulting from suspicions or the competitiveness of some players. Offenders interviewed as part of the study and serving the final months of their sentence prefer not to gamble. They do not want to risk any report of a disciplinary offense because of a fight related to gambling, which may cause them to lose privileges or have their release date delayed. This is the case notably with Adam:

No matter, these days, I don’t do anything. I do nothing because I’m about to get day passes and, next month, I start to go home. So, I start with a guard, and then after I’ll be allowed out on my own. So, that’s another reason to do nothing. (Adam, minimum, incarcerated since 2006)

Vacheret (2005) explains that the CSC bases its management system on a “give-and-take” strategy, collectively called the *candy system*. It is determined not so much by the inmate’s progress relative to his criminal behaviour, but rather by his good behaviour inside the prison. Some prisoners become involved with prison programs because of a genuine desire for personal improvement. However, others voluntarily choose “to conform” to the prison system and follow the correctional plan assigned to them with the sole purpose of gaining privileges, improving their standing with their case supervisors and being granted parole (Vacheret, 2005). The intramural behaviour of the offenders depends on their individual relationship with the prison system and what they want to gain from it.

This could explain why, in our study, few offenders at the end of their sentence or having served several years reported gambling habits, especially in minimum security. If they admitted to betting, they referred to past experiences. Furthermore, we can imagine that these men are more preoccupied with easing out of their prison life than they are with gambling. On this subject, Marchetti (2001) argues that an approaching release generates both excitement and anxiety, especially after a sentence of several years. In short, an individual's position relative to his sentence can influence his preoccupations with and participation in gambling during detention.

Our results also show that certain offenders behave no differently once incarcerated, becoming involved with illicit trade, drug use, influence peddling, etc. This was the case for Jean-François, who had been a member of a street gang and was convicted of two first-degree murders and several attempted murders. During his first years in detention, he was involved in intramural contraband. At the time of our interview, he had already begun to disassociate himself from organized crime and was working to improve his standing with the prison administration. We could perceive in Jean-François a form of acceptance or even submission to the prison system. He now basically conforms to prison rules and no longer gambles.

It's not because I want to win whatever it is, because I like to play, you know? But even then, I can't get too involved. I was doing it more a few months ago, but I stopped because someone spoke to me about it... [...] My parole officer... so there is a report on me, saying that I was playing cards. [...] Everybody knows that it's not seen as a good thing, to play poker. But generally, the guys don't care, because... well, you know, they have short sentences or whatever. For me, I mean, why would I rebel, just to insist on playing poker? If it's seen as bad, I can simply... You know, I can't... I can't say: "No way, I have to play poker." I am going to say: "It's OK, I won't play poker." It isn't... you know, I don't feel I'm missing anything because I'm not gambling. (Jean-François, medium, incarcerated since 1996)

Vacheret (2005) argues that offenders comply with the prison system not only by following official regulations, but also by avoiding other inmates seen as "undesirable" by the administration because they participate in intramural trade, consume drugs or alcohol or are known to be affiliated with criminal gangs. Study participants associated with organized crime claimed they were constantly watched and suspected of scheming, while guards reported their slightest movements. That being said, the interpersonal relations of prisoners convicted of gangsterism are considered more suspect compared to those of other offenders.

In this situation, those who want to leave organized crime isolate themselves from the inmate population. Félix, convicted of gangsterism, does not participate in group activities, such as sports, to avoid altercations with other prisoners. According to him, coming from a criminal biker gang means that he "has to walk

straighter than everyone else” because his every move is being watched and analyzed. Not only does he avoid gambling, he also steers clear of anyone who gambles, thus avoiding any suspicion.

[...] if the guys are in a room, then they start playing cards: to begin with, you’re not allowed to gamble in prison. You’re not supposed to be allowed to gamble; it’s illegal. That means that if I had been in the same room, immediately, [my PO] says: “Look, don’t you understand? It’s illegal, and you do it anyway” [...] when you wind up in a place where everyone gambles, and the guys, most of the time, are gambling even if they...they aren’t allowed...they gamble there, you know, so me, I come from organized crime, what do you think they would say? “Well, you know it’s still illegal, you’re still involved in illegal business.” (Félix, minimum, incarcerated since 2001)

Aside from their affiliation with organized crime, Jean-François and Félix, like other offenders interviewed, share a second characteristic: both are serving life sentences. There is some indication in Vacheret’s study (2005) that offenders serving shorter sentences are more likely to adopt an “anti-institutional” attitude than those serving longer sentences. It also appears that offenders serving life or lengthy sentences acquire a type of wisdom over time (usually a result of age) and remain relatively quiet. They do not, or hardly, become involved with the inmate subculture (inmate code). They follow the recommended programs to improve their standing with their parole officer or because they wish to gain privileges (Vacheret, 2005). Marchetti (2001) believes that for many prisoners serving life sentences, life takes on a new meaning. They acquire patience, learn to value themselves, abandon their materialistic and extravagant values and improve their relationships with family, children or parents.

For other types of crime, only a few times did interviewed offenders confide that they categorically refused to bet with men convicted of sexual assault. According to several authors, the crime for which a person is incarcerated is indeed a major criterion that determines which offenders will or will not be respected. Cooley (1992) observed that, whatever they do, prisoners associated with sexual crimes are at the bottom of the hierarchy and have little chance of improving their position. Chantraine (2004) also highlights this phenomenon: sexual offenders are stigmatized by other inmates. Our sample does not allow us to validate this situation from the perspective of the sexual offenders, because only one participant was imprisoned for this type of offense. Furthermore, he was incarcerated in the prison wing for those with mental health issues and had no contact with the general prison population.

Conclusion

Although, at first glance, some particularities of prison life, such as boredom, solitude and daily monotony, appear to be incentives to gamble as a way for offenders to pass the time and forget their captive situation, our article shows that

gambling does not involve the entire prison population and, overall, that it is not widespread. According to the participants, it appears that the prison environment creates limitations, which affect the different types of gambling. Although prison does not completely halt gambling, it does not in general encourage it either. There are basically four main factors that affect the availability of and access to gambling in prison.

First, incarceration cuts offenders off from the rest of society, removing them from their former life and reference points. If they want to gamble, they must exchange lotteries, VLTs and the highly-charged ambiance of casino settings for games with fellow inmates that, with a few exceptions, are small-scale in terms of number of participants and the amount of the bets. Without state offerings, gambling in detention is considerably less available, especially with the CSC regulation that prohibits gambling between inmates. According to Turner and his team (2013), the absence of electronic forms of gambling (slot machines and VLTs) in part explains why half of the offenders who gambled problematically prior to incarceration stop gambling while in prison.

In theory, the regulation that forbids gambling in federal prisons includes all categories, such as pools, card and board games, PlayStation tournaments (i.e., video games), or dice. In fact, it has more of an effect on games like poker, which are more visible because they involve a group of players in one place at the same time and because poker without bluffing bets is unusual and little satisfying. Offenders who want to bet must obtain tokens and a comfortable place, and play under constant surveillance by guards and cameras. A bet between two tennis players, for example, is more discreet and requires almost no equipment. Canteen items or chips do not need to be on display for the bets to take place.

Second, prison does not provide ideal conditions for gambling, especially board and card games with bets. Prison life exists in restricted physical space. There is limited access to physical space and limited interpersonal contact. The atmosphere seems to be a determining factor in how much the offenders enjoy the game. The rooms are inappropriate and players are sometimes not interested in playing or simply non-existent. While pools can be made anywhere, games such as chess or checkers require concentration, knowledge of the rules and a significant investment of time. Many offenders lack interest in this type of activity, which considerably reduces the number of potential players. These days, the systematic division of the prison population increases the limitations, especially in high-security institutions.

Third, the lack of financial resources is the limitation most frequently mentioned by the study participants. While offenders' low incomes allow them a few inexpensive bets, it is usually not enough for them to participate in games such as poker, which requires consistent and progressive bets, depending on whether it is a tournament or a cash game. Moreover, the wager is usually the dominating element in gambling because it adds meaning to the game, enhances the player's involvement and

increases game tension (Reith, 2006). With limited budgets and monitoring by prison authorities, most of the offenders interviewed manage with small wagers, usually canteen products. These small bets reduce the level of excitement for the players, who become dissatisfied with these games “for beginners.” Reith (2006) explains, however, that the real value of the wager is less important than what it represents for the players, such as power, recognition or success. Nevertheless, several offenders claimed they did not become excited over potato chips or soft drinks, so there might in fact be an actual minimal value needed for a player to feel involved in a game. This situation has a different effect on betting pools, such as sports bets, because the delay typically operating over a period of days, weeks, or even months, whereas a poker game occurs at the table over a period of a couple of hours. Although the cost of participation is trivial, the pot is attractive, as it grows with the number of players. Indeed, a kitty of 30 bags of potato chips is of little interest. However, because of the minimal initial cost, the game is still worth it. As with challenges launched between two friends, the game requires less involvement by the wagers and the purpose is more for amusement than to win soft drinks or bags of chips. However, we cannot confirm this hypothesis, as we did not approach the issue of motivations in the article.

Also, although offenders may complain that small bets do not interest them, there seems to be a limit to what they are willing to risk. Since the ban on tobacco increased its value, we could have expected an increased interest in gambling where cigarettes are wagered. In brief, while there is a minimum bet to reinforce involvement in the game, there is also a ceiling which offenders are reluctant to exceed, at least for those offenders who are not addicted. Gambling remains too risky and tobacco too valuable. Since tobacco can create a dependency in the user (Guyon & al., 2010), the compulsive need to smoke would be greater than the urge to gamble. An offender who has only one cigarette will probably not want to risk losing it in a game, especially if he has no real compulsion to gamble, as with the majority of the prison population. Addiction to smoking is more widespread than addiction to gambling.

Fourth, the length of the sentence or the time remaining until release appears to affect negatively offender involvement in gambling. This limitation applies specifically to offenders at the end of their sentence, serving a long sentence and incarcerated in a minimum-security institution. However, it seems that their primary concern is not the desire to break a habit, but rather to retain their personal privileges by conforming to the prison system. In other words, they do not avoid gambling, but rather the related risks and behaviours. Certain offenders stay away from card games to avoid arguments or fights. Cheating, the closeness of opponents and the competition can create interpersonal conflicts. Offenders who have been involved with organized crime also tend to avoid gambling. This situation is reinforced by the fact that gambling is often part of the deviant lifestyle of certain delinquents and of the prison subculture. If they gamble or associate with prisoners who gamble, they risk harming their standing with those persons in charge of their

case, especially since gambling is not permitted by the CSC. They must demonstrate their willingness to follow the prison rules. They may be interested in gambling, but they are more interested in being released from prison. By escaping their deviant lifestyle or going through a disaffiliation process, they choose to follow their correctional plan. While the prison system does not irrefutably guarantee social reintegration for offenders, its system of privileges has a favourable effect on the intramural behaviour of the inmates. However, it is possible that this limitation is more frequently mentioned by non-problem gamblers, who are more able to control their gambling habits and stay away from games. This finding is also consistent with those findings reported by Turner, Preston, McAvoy & Gillam (2013).

Overall, the analyses reveal that the prison environment is less conducive to betting on board and card games, especially poker, than to pools. Besides reducing availability and variety, the prison environment appears also to reduce the pleasurable aspect of gambling. Whereas in society, gamblers can become immersed in a game and shut off from the rest of the world, because of the tension and the anticipation of the results of their bets (Reith, 2006), prison instead shuts down this ability to escape. Certain prisoners may become involved in gambling regardless, particularly those offenders just starting their sentence in high-security prisons or who adopt a deviant lifestyle. Even though gambling is popular and accessible, it would be a mistake to generalize its prevalence to the entire population. Since the regulation that prohibits gambling is not the primary obstacle, the prison environment indirectly reduces the prevalence of gambling compared to that of free society.

In sum, while gambling in prison varies according to the individual, the restriction of movement and limited hours of access to the gym and exterior courtyard most probably affect its prevalence, especially in high-security institutions. In minimum-security prisons, where the population has more freedom of movement, privileges motivate the offenders to follow the rules. Besides, we can imagine that opening prisons to the rest of society and improving social reintegration programs help create short- and long-term goals for offenders and focus their attention on reaching these goals. By leaving the prison subculture and following their correctional plan, offenders leave behind certain activities unauthorized by the CSC, such as gambling.

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