

I'm here today to speak about the effects that online gambling has had on me. My name is Harry and I'm a 25 year old carpenter. Growing up I had a great childhood, great relationships with family and plenty of friends. I was a social person, always outside doing things with friends. I spent weekends after weekends going camping with my dad, we had a great relationship.

I started a carpentry apprenticeship when I first turned 17. I loved it but was hanging out with two people 8-10 years older than me so we would go to the pub for beers quite often. This is when I first gambled. Starting on the pokies, I wasn't earning much and would only spend a minimum amount of money on the pokies. I would have a few bets here and there on the horses at the TAB machine but it wasn't a problem for me because the minute I left it was out of my mind.

I got my first bookmaker when I turned 18. The first ever deposit I did was 100% matched in bonus bets. It started out spending 20 dollars here 20 dollars there with a few wins and losses.

Within a month or so I was spending more than I could afford. I knew I was getting hooked early on but I didn't know just how bad I was going to get. The more I spent the more I was looked after by these online bookmakers. Before long I was spending everything I was getting paid. Most weeks I'd get paid at 6pm Friday and it would be gone by Friday night.

This led to me having numerous bookmakers on the go at once. Always being offered deposit matches of 100% up to 1000 every single week and sometimes twice or 3 times a day if I was spending enough.

I had a \$17,000 personal loan for a ute I bought when I was on my Ps and when I sold it I spent the lot on the horses in one day. This led me to miss repayments on the loan week after week instead of paying the loan repayments I would gamble everything I had. Because of this I've spent the last 5 years avoiding phone calls from the bank chasing their money. My credit rating is terrible because of this and instead of paying back the repayments I'd deposit everything I had and try to win back enough to pay it.

I was living with my partner for the first year that I was gambling so my family didn't know but I decided to tell them when I was losing control. They're extremely supportive of me. My partner and I moved back to my parents house 4 years ago and as my gambling progressed it put stress and tension between my family, partner and I.

I became a compulsive liar. Saying I hadn't been gambling and making up stories as to where my money was going. I've lied so many times about my addiction that for the last few years I don't feel like I belong in the family. I've completely betrayed my family and partner on so many occasions that the rare occasion that I am telling the truth about where my money is going I still feel I can't be trusted.

My gambling has caused so many problems with my partner. She just wants the best for me and I continually let her down with my actions. She's tried to look after my money for me to help me from losing it all but she can't do it anymore, she got sick and tired of having to deal with me beg for my money and lie to her about what I needed it for. There has been countless amounts of times where I've demanded my money off her and turned into a complete monster to get it. I've abused her, called her names, said things that I never thought as a kind human being could be said to the person who just wants the best for me. I'm not proud of how I've treated her and I never will be, I knew I was in a deep hole when she would be sitting in tears begging for me to leave her alone and all I could do was keep asking until she finally gave in.

I've borrowed money I haven't paid back, I've stolen money and made up stories of things I need to buy to get funds to feed my addiction after spending every cent I earned from working. I've withdrawn on my loan numerous times. I've had to borrow money to pay back credit cards that I only got to punt with. No body can trust me because I continually let them down with my actions and addiction.

I've pushed away my closest friends and family in order to punt. I've burnt bridges with people because I simply can't be trusted. So many times, I've been invited to go out and do things that I used to love but have withdrawn from it because it gets in the way of my addiction. The rare times I would go camping or fishing with my dad or friends I'd be withdrawn sitting on my phone hiding the fact I was either gambling or still watching the racing after I had lost.

My mental health and confidence is completely gone. Throughout my addiction I've lost touch with myself. Self care is a thing of the past, I went years barely brushing my teeth and now I have holes all through them so I don't like smiling as I feel people will see. There have been countless times when I've lost everything that I sit there and think the best way out would be to harm myself. For so long the only hope I had was knowing that another pay was coming the next week and in my mind I thought that the next time would be the time I win enough and give it up for good.

I was using a bookmaker so much that I was given a personal assistant who I could ring anytime of the day to get bonus's, deposit matches, enquiries, markets etc. I was completely rinsing myself getting bonus after bonus. One day I messaged

him asking for a deposit match on my next bonus which normally was replied to and granted within a few minutes. I received a message off a number I didn't recognise, it was Steve my assistant messaging me to say that he was shutting my account and that it was for the best for me. He said I was too young to be doing this to myself and there was more to life for me. If only I listened. I added this in because I feel if he had sent that message of the work number he knew he'd get in trouble.

Normally I'd shut accounts permanently myself however on some occasions when I would win big my account would be restricted and bets I would try and place would be sent to a trader- often getting knocked back or my odds reduced. I've had bookmakers happy to give me bonus bets and offers for tickets to NRL games, functions, race meets when I'm losing but the minute I start winning big amounts my account would be closed.

I can't watch footy games with family and friends on free to air TV anymore because of how many ads promoting online gambling there are. The reality of gambling addiction is the opposite of what is portrayed on these ads. It's not fun when you've lost \$400,000, 7 years of your life, all your friends, the trust of your family and lost yourself.

They prey on innocent people saying how good online gambling is, how good dragging all your mates into a punters group is, how flashy the idea of landing bets is. There's nothing in these ads saying it can and will destroy your life. They don't care about people's lives being destroyed, as long as there's taking your money then they're sweet.

I started seeing a counsellor at Relationships Australia to try and get some help. They were great however the moment I was offered a deposit match on a new bookie I would stop going and continue to gamble. I've been to GA's and hypnotherapy but would give it a go to stop and fall straight back into my addiction. At the end of 2021 I spent my whole Christmas holidays in a rehab in Sydney. I managed to get a few weeks away from gambling after this until seeing numerous gambling ads gave me the itch back and I relapsed, quickly going back to the exact habits I was doing before going away. I then got introduced to a second hypnotherapist who really helped me to understand why I am like I am.

In total I have lost over \$400,000 dollars using over 100 online bookmakers. I banned myself from all Northern Territory licensed bookmakers 3 years ago and still found a way to gamble online. I would receive Phone calls, emails and text messages from new bookmakers offering me sign up bonus' to join up.

I take full responsibility for what I've become and although not out of it I will get there however it makes it so hard to get my life back on track when I can't get away from promotion of online gambling and continued offers of deposit matches. I worry for the young people innocently watching the footy on a Thursday, Friday or Sunday afternoon who are forced to watch countless ads from countless bookmakers dragging them in to a life of problems.

Bookies will live without ads and handing out bonus bets. Plenty of the people it's harming won't. It's a silent killer for many and I feel there needs to be more promotion on how people who are struggling can get help.

There needs to be more promotion and funding into help for people struggling with gambling addiction. Make ads showing the truth of it all.

So please ban, or at least limit, the amount of ads promoting online gambling and ban bookmakers from offering deposit matches I feel you can save plenty of lives lost to online gambling. It's no joke what online gambling does to you. You can punt any place anytime as long as you have a phone with data.

For the rest of us, look out for your friends and your family in general. Some are one win away from a smile and one loss away from death.