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Time Until Seeking Help in Pathological Gamblers

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Introduction: Pathological gambling is a behavioral addictive disorder that usually results in a severe financial and psychosocial disaster. A longer duration of the disorder is associated with more severe problems. Thus, early therapeutic interventions may reduce the burden of pathological gambling.

Objectives: To explore factors associated with time to seeking help.

Methods: Data of all subjects who attended for their first time the largest treatment institution for pathological gamblers in Vienna, the 'Spielsuchthilfe' from the years 2002 to 2013, and who had never had treatment for pathological gambling before, were analyzed.

Results: In total 2313 subjects (1941 men and 372 woman) with pathological gambling or problem gambling could be included in the analysis. The mean time from beginning of the problem to first treatment was 6.4 years (SD 6.8). In an analysis of variance of the years from 2002 to 2013 there was no significant difference in the time to first treatment. Women attended treatment significantly earlier than men (mean 4.9 vs. 6.7 years) and subjects with later onset of the disorder (> 26 years) (mean 5.0 vs. 8.0 years).

Conclusions: Although there was an increasing amount of information on the media on gambling in the last years this did not promote help seeking behavior to the same extent. The results suggest that subjects with a later onset of the disorder and probably more stable personality attend treatment in an earlier stage of the disorder . Thus, prevention programs should focus more on the needs of younger subjects.