Vulnerability, Addictions, and Dependencies in Modern Society: A Sociological Perspective*

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Abstract

From the standpoint of both specialized sociological inquiry (Misztal, 2011) and sociolinguistics (Goutsos & Bella, 2022), the term "vulnerability" may be considered a late-modern neologism used to describe a specific psycho-emotional state. It is a concept found in the fields of psychology and psychiatry, as well as the specialized sociology of emotions. By definition, vulnerability denotes the quality of being susceptible—of being easily overwhelmed or unable to effectively withstand a threat or an attack[1]. There is also the view, within the context of establishing a formal definition, that considers transparency, receptivity, and sensitivity as synonyms of vulnerability—provided that courage is present as a prerequisite[2]. In other words, vulnerability is the emotion we experience during periods of uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure.

Key words: vulnerability, addictions, dependencies, sociology, gambling

Introduction: Toward a Special Sociology of Addictions

Furthermore, a specialized Sociology of Addiction—or addictions—is currently developing, as addiction in its various forms is approached as a social phenomenon; these are significant conditions that affect social relationships and largely determine their quality. The purpose of this specialized sociological inquiry is to observe and analyze the social consequences arising from addictions and addicted individuals, as well as the social stigma and stereotypes associated with them. The need for substance use, for instance, or the abuse of activities such as internet browsing, clearly defines the magnitude of the problem. It has been noted since the 1970s that sociologists shifted their research focus toward behaviors that could be characterized as antisocial, stemming from addiction to alcohol, drugs, sex, etc. (Weinberg, 2011).

In today's 'risk societies,' hazards spread with greater speed than in the past; alongside the globalization of the economy, for example, social risks of all kinds have also become globalized (Denaxas, 2021a). The speed at which information travels, as well as the rapid evolution of the Fourth Biotechnological Revolution, plays a crucial role. Addictions may no longer have limited consequences (e.g., confined to a single family or community) but are acquiring a mass, comprehensive, and holistic character with repercussions that extend even to the environment.

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Online Gambling in Greece

According to the Hellenic Gaming Commission (HGC), the total amount spent by Greeks on gambling rose from 15.9 billion euros in 2019 to 29.2 billion in 2022, reaching 37 billion euros in 2024—within a Greece characterized by energy poverty and underconsumption[3], conditions more complex than those of the Greek debt crisis era (2010–) (Denaxas, 2021b). These amounts do not include sums wagered through illegal gambling, abroad, or on the darknet, which are estimated to total €1.5 billion. Experts from KETHEA (Therapy Center for Dependent Individuals) consider that a person suffering from pathological gambling exhibits, among others, the following (indicative) behaviors[4]: «*Preoccupation with gambling; restlessness and irritability when attempting to cut down or stop; a tendency to borrow money to resolve temporary financial crises; repeated unsuccessful efforts to control, reduce, or stop gambling; prolonged or unexplained absences from home and work; intensive study of schedules and betting tips via television, newspapers, radio, and the internet; defensiveness toward suggestions or comments from others regarding one's gambling habits; decreased work productivity; and feelings of distress, anger, and escalating tension if prevented from playing*».

The gambling addict resorts to gambling in order to escape the everyday reality they experience—which leaves them largely indifferent—and to fill the profound void within their soul with something 'exciting.' Interestingly, data shows that individuals aged 17 to 24 prefer online gambling, with 77.4% opting for sports betting, online casino games, and slots. Regarding illegal gambling, 68.5% of those who participated were men and 31.5% were women. The primary demographic for illegal wagering was the 25 to 54 age group, while the 17-24 group accounted for 10.3% of players. 'Underage students in Greece—specifically 16-year-olds—have ranked first in Europe in electronic gaming for two consecutive four-year periods, and we are currently awaiting the latest results of the same study. Especially following the COVID-19 pandemic, we have seen a significant increase,' stated Meni Malliori, Professor of Psychiatry at NKUA, during a broadcast on Greek TV[5].

According to a recent study, 74.9% of Greeks choose online platforms, where the Gross Gaming Revenue (GGR)—defined as total wagers minus player winnings—reaches 876 million euros. At the same time, however, only 5.41% opt for legal land-based casinos, where the GGR barely exceeds 230 million euros. Meanwhile, 18.63% turn to OPAP agencies, with the GGR surpassing 1.3 billion euros across retail locations and VLTs (Video Lottery Terminals). Within the same context, less than 1% choose lotteries (120 million euros), and a mere 0.09% opt for horse racing (8.9 million euros)[6]. Furthermore, within the field of transactions and the cryptocurrency market as a whole (Denaxas 2025: 166), we identify key characteristics that constitute the 'self-awareness' or 'psychology' of the 'player'—the gambler. This is an individual who lacks awareness of their true needs, who has inherently and intentionally devalued actual labor, and who seeks financial, and consequently social, validation through this realm of the intangible economy.

Religion and Gambling

Within the context of contemporary social conditions, it is evident that despite the pressures of postmodern militant secularism, religions continue to exert a clear influence on social behavior and the broader framework of social ethics (Denaxas, 2022). Specialized studies and research highlighting the role of religions and religious cultures in relation to addictions—and specifically gambling—are of particular interest (Calado et al., 2024). The impasses faced by a gambling addict often appear to lead them toward spiritual quests, sometimes with specific reference to a particular religious tradition. Unfortunately, superstition and prejudice are hallmarks of a gambling addict's personality (e.g., black cats, the number 13, etc.). In Islam, for instance, gambling is generally considered *haram* and is explicitly forbidden (Naeem, 2025; Sulaiman et al., 2023, p. 35)—a fact that stands in contradiction to the reality that major casino enterprises operate in strictly Islamic countries, such as the UAE[7]. In Judaism, gambling is viewed as a result of greed—an act that displeases God and is therefore subject to punishment (Vana et al., 2024).

Furthermore, within the framework of Orthodox Christian Literature and Tradition, the writings of Basil the Great regarding both those addicted to gambling and the venues where games of chance were commonly played are of particular interest. The Holy Father's discourse offers an exceptionally piercing insight, describing the consequences of gambling addiction in a way that resonates uniquely with today's social reality. Specifically, he refers to the 'pangs' of greed and the tension that can lead even to violence. He also describes the psycho-emotional instability of the 'player,' noting that leisure time, when not accompanied by the 'fear of God,' becomes, under such circumstances, a 'teacher of wickedness[8]. Besides, as it is correctly noted: *'temptation functions as a constant test of human will*,' something that ultimately seems to transcend time, as well as cultural and religious differences (Tsitsigkos, 2010: 127).

Classic Addictions and Dependencies

Classic addictions are those associated with substance abuse, such as drugs and alcohol. However, do we not also encounter the terms of dependency in those who use or abuse antidepressants? It is indicative that during the pandemic crisis, chemical laboratories analyzing wastewater detected an increase in the consumption of alcohol, drugs (primarily cocaine), and antidepressant pills. Empirical data confirms this trend in Greece. Between 2000 and 2020, the use of antidepressants in our country increased by approximately 50%, according to OECD data, which ranks Greece 6th among nations with the highest increase in antidepressant prescriptions. This alarming leap had already occurred before the end of the pandemic, which demonstrably triggered a significant deterioration in our mental health. Dr. Dimitris Kontis, President of the Scientific Council of the Psychiatric Hospital of Attica (PsNA), stated: *'The prolonged economic crisis in our country, followed by the pandemic, increased the prevalence of depression and, by extension, the use of antidepressants*'[9]. In the outpatient clinics of the Psychiatric Hospital of Attica (PsNA), patient attendance has been significantly higher in recent years. Alcohol is considered—and not by chance—the 'scourge of the working class.' The posters and relevant brochures of Health Committees and Youth Organizations in the former USSR are characteristic of the effort to limit alcohol consumption, an issue that consistently caused social and other problems, such as reduced worker productivity

(Weissman, 1986). Furthermore, on the website of the KETHEA, we read that: 'the primary indicator of alcohol addiction is that the individual finds satisfaction only through the continuous consumption of alcoholic beverages. Some of the most common symptoms of addiction include: development of tolerance; unsuccessful attempts to reduce consumption despite a desire for control; wasting time and money in the process of obtaining alcohol; a progressive decline in family, social, and professional activities; withdrawal symptoms (tremors in the hands and tongue, sweating, nausea, irritability, anxiety, headache, insomnia, etc.); and the consumption of alcohol for the purpose of avoiding or relieving these withdrawal symptoms (...)'[10].

It is of particular significance that KETHEA itself considers the family a vital factor in the prospect of recovery; it has been proven that family involvement reinforces substance abstinence, acts preventatively against the psychological distress of other family members, and reduces high-stress situations. The support of the family and 'significant others' provides the knowledge and skills necessary to address addictive behaviors within the domestic environment, motivating the addicted individual to seek and remain in treatment.

Epilogue

As previously mentioned, the rapid evolution of technology has already created new conditions and realities with very tangible social consequences. A primary example is internet addiction. We now encounter so-called IAD (Internet Addiction Disorder), which is being observed in increasingly younger age groups (Salicetia, 2015). This disorder is further categorized based on the specific network application the individual tends to use (Facebook, Instagram, X, etc.). The distorted socialization resulting from internet addiction has created a need for specialized digital detoxification programs that focus on strengthening communication skills. The combination of this idealized 'online individuality' with the self-restraints and censorial nature of 'political correctness' establishes a culture of fear; this undermines the very quality of Democracy by suppressing even the intent to express oneself. In this context, it is viewed as a positive development that the Greek Government recently (April 2026) adopted a new regulatory framework for the protection of minors, proposing a minimum age limit of 15 for social media use, set to take effect in January 2027[11].

Notes

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