

SUMMARY AND MAIN OBSERVATIONS

There are many opportunities to play poker (at Holland Casino, illegal poker tournaments, playing poker at home and poker on the internet). It seems the most popular is playing poker at home with friends and playing poker on the internet.

Poker is popular (not only in the Netherlands, as witnessed by the results of a European inquiry from the Netherlands gaming control board) and will get a definite place in the games proffered. As yet it is not possible to comment on the form, the range and the time span. Poker is (as yet) not a social problem, there are no unsettling figures emanating from the research. Nevertheless, a number of issues are noticeable.

A quarter of the young people interviewed and a quarter of the members of the Poker Association indicated that poker was addictive. Additionally, the majority of the young people said they spent more on poker than on other games of chance. Furthermore, members of the Poker Association indicated that they play poker on average 12 hours per week. Young people who play poker more than once a month play on average 3½ hours per week. More than half of the young people who play poker on the internet play on average more than once a month. The young people who play poker on average more than once a month on poker sites play on average 4½ hours per week. For these groups, poker seems to be an intense way of spending their leisure time.

Thirty percent of, respectively, the interviewed young people and the guests of Holland Casino expect to play poker more often in the future (even 54 % for members of the Poker Association). Therefore, in all probability poker will remain popular. Moreover, members of the Poker Association and guests of Holland Casino indicate that they expect to play with greater financial input.

Experts in the field of addiction only since very recently have any experience with poker addicts. They have a growing concern about the risks of addiction, especially amongst young people. They indicate that the possible risks of poker are comparable to those of gambling addiction in general. In recent news reports it was stated that young people can get into financial problems because of playing poker.

In particular the poker-playing young people form a group to be closely observed. They form a large group of poker players. They are particularly vulnerable for the development of an addiction. Furthermore, it seems from the research that young people often play poker on internet. The social control is therefore limited. Also the cool, smart and innocent image (in the media) is noticeable, often inspired by many success stories. It is recommended that in particular the popularity of poker amongst young people should be (continued) to be followed. Moreover, all parties involved have (and take) their own responsibility.

Furthermore, the unfamiliarity with the legal regulations for poker is noticeable. Young people but also members of the Poker Association do not always know very well what is allowed and what is not allowed. Local authorities also frequently are unsure about the legal framework of poker. They quite regularly search for (and find) information with institutions such as the Association of Netherlands Municipalities, the Tax Office and the Netherlands gaming control board. Targeted communication about the legal regulations would therefore be advisable.

Illegal tournaments remain popular. From discussions and reports in the media, it seems that, occasionally, this also attracts the attention of criminals (for instance, the operation of poker facilities, such as previously with illegal casinos). At the moment, at least four poker locations have been raided (in which, at the start of 2007, regrettably even somebody was killed).

The illegal poker tournaments were recently tackled intensively and with success, giving the impression that there is good cooperation between the enforcement agencies. There is, and will always remain, an illegal supply. The researchers don't think that it is up to them to give an answer to the question whether more enforcement is needed. In combination with the continuation of stringent enforcement, targeted information about the legal framework of poker helps, with as much prevention as possible from holding illegal poker tournaments.

Due to the increasing popularity of internet poker, adjustments to the legal regulations should be considered. At the moment, the Netherlands Act on games of chance does not allow internet poker, but a bill is in progress to allow Holland Casino to offer internet poker. As can be derived from the results of the European inquiry by the Netherlands gaming control board, in most countries gaming legislation shall not be adjusted for the time being with a view to the popularity of poker. Only a few countries are planning to do this. The motives for this are mainly the popularity of poker on the internet.

Finally, there is still a much aired discussion whether poker is a game of chance or a game of skill. A distinction should be made between the legal definition and actual perception of poker. From a legal viewpoint, poker comes under the Act on Games of Chance and is therefore a game of chance. In reality it is more subtle. From the research it seems that the opinions of the respondents were divided (members of the Poker Association consider poker a game of skill, young people vary in judgement about it). Poker could best be described as a game of chance which includes very definite elements of skill (more than roulette and black jack, for example). This probably explains the popularity of the game.