

BEHIND CLOSED DOORS

The Reality of Women and Gambling Harm

Christina R. Cook | 2026

Christina Cook, IGRS

Christina is a certified International Gambling Recovery Specialist (IGRS) and the creator and host of The Broke Girl Society Podcast and Support Group, a leading platform for women in gambling recovery. Drawing on her lived experience, she advocates for awareness, connection, and peer support, giving voice to women's often hidden struggles with gambling harm. Christina works to bridge the gap between lived experience and professional practice, helping to reduce stigma and expand pathways to recovery.

Christina currently serves on the boards of:

- **International Problem Gambling and Gaming Certification Board (IPGGC) - Executive Board Secretary**

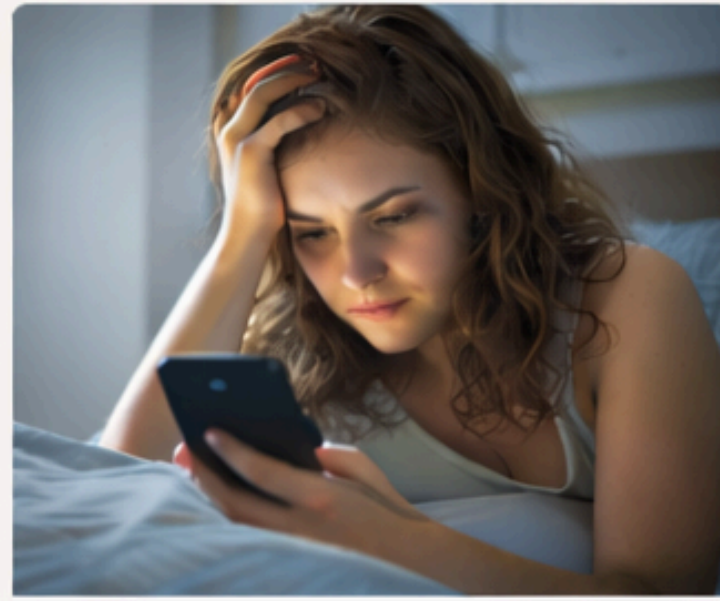



The Broke Girl Society®

When you picture a problem gambler, who do you picture?



College-aged young man



Young woman



Elderly woman



Older poker player



Society (and media coverage) still treats gambling harm as a male story, casting women as affected others and overlooking the quiet, everyday harm many women experience through their own gambling across every life stage.



A photograph of three young women sitting on a grey couch in a brightly lit room with a white brick wall. The woman on the left has her hair in a bun and wears a light green top. The woman in the middle has curly hair and wears a yellow cardigan. The woman on the right has long straight hair and wears a striped off-the-shoulder top; she has a sad expression and is looking down. All three are holding white mugs. A semi-transparent pink banner with white text is overlaid across the middle of the image.

The lived experience reality: stigma + identity pressure

Dual Burden of Shame



[Redacted Name]

I think society sees women as needing to present a perfect persona - like we have it all together all the time. Men do not have that same expectation, so when we face similar struggles, women are often held to a higher standard. It's feels like a flaw of character or willpower, rather than an addiction, which is an equal opportunity affliction.

~ Member of the Broke Girl Society

Gendered Societal Expectations



Mother → "bad mother," "neglectful," "unfit parent"

Wife/Partner → "irresponsible spouse," "letting the family down"

Caretaker → "failing at her duty," "selfish"

Household role → "ruined the family finances," "broke trust"

Emotional framing → "weak," "unstable/hormonal," "addicted because of trauma or loneliness"

Moral language → "shameful," "secretive"

Gendered Societal Expectations



Provider → "failed provider," "irresponsible with money"

Worker → "lazy," "risk-taker who lost it all"

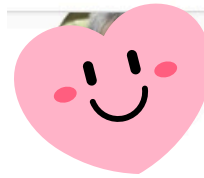
Competitor → "reckless," "obsessed with winning"

Independence role → "lacks discipline," "can't control himself"

Emotional framing → "irresponsible," "chasing a high," less often tied to trauma

Moral language → "degenerate," "loser," "addict"

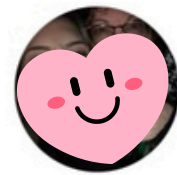
Financial Irresponsibility



[REDACTED] ~ Member of the Broke Girl Society

I am both an alcoholic (clean and sober 31 years) and a compulsive gambler (bet free 2 years) - I have shared on both my Facebook posts and in this private group I am an alcoholic - I however have NOT shared on my facebook post that I am a compulsive gambler - for me I believe that I would be heavily judged and not trusted with finances. I only have told my closest friends of my gambling and they have been supportive but on a whole - I just feel waaayyy to vulnerable to share that with the outside world. It is truly a different stigma to me.

Validation of Struggle



[REDACTED]

In our society, I think when people say "alcoholic" or "gambler," the first image that comes to mind is a man. In fact, more so for gambling. We don't fit that preconceived notion of a what a compulsive gambler looks like. It's bad enough dealing with this horrible addiction, but to have to convince people we really have an addiction? ~ Member of the Broke Girl Society

Judgement



[REDACTED]

I think we get judged harsher. It's assumed we're terrible mothers (care-givers) where I don't hear the same thing of men for men it seems to just focus on strictly the gambling problem. People want to help men, women get judged.

~ Member of the Broke Girl Society

A photograph of four women standing in a line, seen from behind. They are all wearing long-sleeved shirts and have their arms around each other's shoulders in a supportive gesture. From left to right: the first woman has short dark hair and is wearing a blue denim jacket; the second woman is wearing a pink hijab and a brown long-sleeved shirt; the third woman has long, straight, light-colored hair and is wearing a dark blue long-sleeved shirt; the fourth woman has short dark hair and is wearing a brown long-sleeved shirt. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

Hormones, Mood Shifts, and Risk Windows



- **Some women experience shifts in mood and reward sensitivity across the menstrual cycle.**
- **Research found gambling behaviors often increased around ovulation (not only premenstrual).**

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- **When we talk about women and gambling harm, we often jump straight to ‘middle-aged’ stereotypes. But I want to name that vulnerability can start much earlier, in the teen years and young adulthood, and it’s often hidden in plain sight.**
- **This age range comes with huge biological and life transitions happening at the same time: hormonal cycles, birth control changes, pregnancy/postpartum for some, and also identity formation, relationship changes, school stress, early career pressure, and financial instability.**

Postpartum
(high-risk + highly hidden)



- **Postpartum is one of the most invisible windows. Hormonal shifts, sleep deprivation, anxiety/depression, isolation, and overwhelm are common - and many women feel pressure to look 'fine.'**
- **Online gambling fits into postpartum life because it's private, accessible, and can be done in bed while feeding a baby or when everyone else is asleep.**
- **If a woman is struggling postpartum, shame can keep her from disclosing anything, especially gambling, because the fear is, 'People will think I'm a bad mom.'**



Perimenopause (often overlooked)

- **Perimenopause can be a perfect storm: fluctuating hormones plus sleep disruption, anxiety, depression, irritability, brain fog, identity shifts, relationship stress, and caregiver overload.**
- **Many women tell me, 'I don't feel like myself.' And when you don't feel like yourself, you're more likely to reach for something that changes your state quickly.**
- **If a woman is using gambling to cope, perimenopause can intensify both the urge and the shame, because she may feel 'too old for this' or like she should have life figured out.**



Menopause
(and the myth that risk 'ends')

- **“Menopause doesn't automatically mean stability. Some women experience ongoing sleep issues, mood changes, or major life transitions at the same time — empty nest, divorce, caregiving, grief.”**
- **“If gambling is tied to escape or loneliness, this stage can increase vulnerability, especially with easy access to online gambling at night when sleep is hard.”**

How To Help



CONCLUSION

By addressing the unique aspects of gender-specific stigma, society can create a more supportive and understanding environment for women with gambling disorders, helping them to seek the help they need and move towards building a life they don't want to escape from.





THANK YOU

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