

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Amendment to Motion

Resumed from an earlier stage of the sitting.

HON ROBYN McSWEENEY (South West) [5.36 pm]: I think I will do as Hon Peter Foss did and summarise the first half of my comments!

Hon Peter Foss: You can't go wrong doing that.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: I will not do that. Before questions without notice were taken I was referring to the social effects on people of gambling on poker machines, rather than on horses. I quote from the *Consumer Rights Journal* -

- Problem gamblers with an average age of 37.7 years, are almost as likely to be women (46%) as to be men (54%). About one-quarter (22.8%) of these clients were born overseas, in a wide range of countries.
- The men were twice as likely as women to have never been married and also were twice as likely to be living alone.

Problem gamblers presenting to services reported that they spent a considerable amount of time gambling. On average they gamble for three hours a day on two days of the week. By far the most common avenue is the electronic gaming machine (80.8%). Two-thirds (67.7%) of the clients reported that they had tried to control their gambling, and failed.

Not surprisingly, 'gambling behaviour' (72.9%) was the most common main reason for attending the problem gambling services, although 77.4% of all problem-gambler clients, experienced financial problems.

Some interesting figures from Victoria show that there are more than twice the number of gaming machines in the poorer western suburbs of Melbourne than in the generally wealthy eastern suburbs. It continues -

Recent figures from Sydney confirm this trend. Hotel owners in the Canterbury-Bankstown and Liverpool-Fairfield areas, which have the lowest median incomes in the Sydney metropolitan area, earn the highest profits from gaming in New South Wales. These two areas have median household incomes of just \$629 and \$671 a week respectively yet hotelkeepers earn an average annual gaming profit of \$1.36 million in Canterbury-Bankstown and \$1.5 million in Liverpool-Fairfield. By contrast, in the generally wealthier eastern suburbs, the average profit is \$799,660.

Statistics from the Tasmanian gambling welfare organisation Break Even provide a further example. Of their clients with a known income range, half have an annual income below \$20,000, while 73 percent have an income below \$30,000.

Governments and big business alike are deliberately preying on the social hardship being experienced in working class areas. In total, the gambling industry earned \$11.3 billion in profits 1997-98, up \$1.3 billion from the previous year, itself a record. Nationwide, people bet a total of \$94.5 billion, an increase of some 15 percent in one year. This averages out at around \$4,725 for every man, woman and child.

We do not want that in Western Australia.

The editor of the *Sunday Times* says -

So far the Gallop Government has resisted strong overtures from the hotels and clubs which want approval for pokies. They see them as a way of dramatically improving their finances.

If any WA state government is ever tempted to approve pokies because of the revenue which would pour into its coffers from the machines -

I will explain how much revenue they would get -

- it needs to look only to NSW to see the detrimental impact pokies have had on life there.

It is amazing to think that the number of machines in NSW has grown to be 10 per cent of the world's total. The number of pokies has doubled in the past five years.

The pokies have become so prolific that last month the NSW Government unveiled gaming reforms which will cap the number of machines permanently at 104,000 -

As it should -

Freedom of choice is one thing, but WA has enough social problems without letting these games of chance create havoc in our community.

They would indeed create havoc if they were allowed into Western Australia.

The other important social issue that I will talk about is youth suicide. A few weeks ago a young woman won an award by speaking on youth suicide. She said she spoke on youth suicide because she believed that no-one cared about the escalating statistics. One of my daughters, who is 20, has already been to the funerals of three of her classmates - two young men and one young girl.

The girl, who I will call "Sally", was 18. When her father pulled into the driveway she was hanging in front of him in the shed. The words, "hanging in the shed" do not sound like much. I think people like to say them quickly and hope that the problem will go away. However, Sally was a daughter to two people, a sister, a cousin, and someone's grand-daughter; she had aunts and uncles and she was a friend to many young people. Her parents were very considerate. They let the teenagers of the town go to the funeral parlour and view her body, because they thought that was the right thing to do. One of my kids told me later that that coffin was loaded when it went down. I asked her what she meant by loaded. She said that it went down full of Jack Daniels and high quality marijuana. She said that was the tribute the kids wanted to give this girl. Apparently her parents let the coffin go down like that. I am not going to analyse that. If I started analysing it, I would probably go mad, because that is what helped kill the girl in the first place. The kids decided that was a good send off for Sally, and that is what happened. This girl loved Jack Daniels and marijuana. I curse the stuff - marijuana and Jack Daniels. However, one does not analyse funerals, one just lets them be.

One of the boys who died was also found hanging in the back shed. His mother found him. His mother was found cuddling him. She had managed to cut him down and she was found on the cold floor just cuddling him. She did not want to let him go. For four hours she just held him. People everywhere are affected by suicide. With every death at least 200 people or more are saddened.

These kids were bright kids. I followed some of the patterns of these kids: they are between 18 and 20 years of age; they have been school duxes and prefects; they have been good at sport and they have all been well loved. That is another myth that we can kick: all these kids had been well loved. Hon Murray Criddle mentioned a young man he knew who was in his thirties when he committed suicide recently. People ask why they do it. I do not have the answer to that. However, I know they want to stop what is hurting and whatever it is that is bothering them. It is a fact that within our society men are thought of as providers. When they go bankrupt, or the farm is in recession and they can no longer hold things together, they feel a great sense of failure. I have concern for the farmers who are facing drought conditions. A growing number of men between the ages of 35 and 45 commit suicide. How do we stop it? I do not believe that government has the answer. We can provide services, but will these men use them? Mental health is a major problem in our community.

I will move from suicide to disabilities. The other night Hon Barbara Scott brought Monica McGhee into the House. Monica was a thalidomide child, and she has no arms and legs. She gets around in a motorised wheelchair. She adopted Hon Barbara Scott in the adopt-a-politician scheme. Monica wants to live; she has a great capacity for life. She directs her wheelchair with a straw. That is the only way that she can move around. She is bright and intelligent, and she tries so hard. She was telling me about the services that are available, the money that she can get and how she would love to be independent. She tries so hard. I fed her the night that she came here for tea. I remember saying that I had a headache, and I felt so ashamed of myself. I had a headache, so what! She has no arms and no legs and she makes beautiful scarves. She is trying to get on with her life. She is about 30 or 31. I remember when Monica was a baby; she was a Telethon baby and she was always in the news. As I said, I felt ashamed of myself for complaining about a headache.

Recently in my electorate I spent some considerable time with Activ Industries in Albany. It operates what we used to call a sheltered workshop, and I know that is not the politically correct terminology to use now.

Hon Sue Ellery: It is "supported employment".

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: The facility in Albany is probably unique. People work together in that supported employment. I do not think there are too many of these facilities left around the State.

Hon Sue Ellery: They are in country centres.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: It was great to see them all working together and supporting each other. They were all friendly and they wanted to show me their work. Some were cutting up foam, some were bagging rags to sell and some were making wood crafts. Activ Industries has two shops and they are doing really well. They have contracts to make gazebos. I was there on payday and the people there knew it was payday; they were looking forward to getting their pay. Nowadays if parents have a child like that they would want to put their

child in school and all that sort of thing - make it part of the community; but years ago parents did not do that. Parents would have to work out what they thought was best for their child. They all seemed happy to mix with their own peer group. They all seemed to care for each other and look out for each other.

Last month, I had the pleasure of visiting the Albany Primary School, where I handed out honour certificates to the little kids. If anything makes me feel humbled, it is bending down to shake the hands of little four-year-old kids and giving them honour certificates. They thought I was God, or just about. It made me feel old and wrinkled, especially with their little white hands in mine.

Hon Derrick Tomlinson: What makes you think that God is old and wrinkled?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: I do not know. I always had the image of God as being white, old and wrinkled. Maybe he is not. Maybe he is multicultural - I do not know.

A few weeks ago I was at Great Southern Grammar for its Foundation Day celebrations. Will Upson, the music master, had the children playing musical instruments, and it was delightful to listen to the school choir. I do not think I have ever heard anything as lovely as that. In our society, we are fortunate that we can choose to which schools we send our children. Two of my children went to private schools and two went to public schools. My two children who went to private schools loved it, as did the two children who went to state schools. Funding should be given to both public and private schools.

I will return to the question of suicide and the drugs found on the kids. Many kids commit suicide, and when an autopsy is performed often they have marijuana or amphetamines in their blood. An article entitled "The Common Good - Drugs and Parenting" by Trevor Craddock states -

Odyssey House drug rehabilitation centre treats nearly 500 young people and of them, more than 90 per cent would have begun taking drugs at ages 13, 14 and 15. A similar percentage would come from dysfunctional homes. Any significant reduction in the number of youth becoming drug takers will need a big improvement in the way families behave.

The young people we treat invariably claim to have felt unwanted. The consequent lack of self-esteem leads to drugs. Anyone lacking self-esteem is unlikely to behave normally. With 40 per cent of marriages ending in divorce and 50 per cent of second marriages likewise, there has to be a great number of children either without both parents or living with a step-parent or a de facto parent. While this in itself does not mean neglect or disaffection, the chances are increased.

A typical scenario encountered at Odyssey is where mum and her de facto come home from work and want to relax, only to be confronted by a teenager seeking attention. Money is likely to be given to the teenager to get rid of him or her for a while.

The chances of that teenager going down the street and getting involved with drug taking acquaintances are high. The amount of heavy drinking, violence and lack of parental capacity to deal with teenagers is frightening, if Odyssey clients are an example.

Almost nobody can carry out a job without training. Yet for the two most important positions we enter into adult life - being a husband or wife and being a parent - no training is required and it is rarely entered into.

I remember that when I was working at the old Family and Children's Services, a 15-year-old girl had just had a baby in the town in which I happened to be at the time. Everyone was complaining that this girl did not know how to hold the baby or how to feed it. The girl was dirty and had bare feet. The baby was being pushed from doctors to grandparents, and it was my job to assess this baby and what this girl was doing with it. When I went into the girl's house, I found that it was absolutely filthy - it was a pigsty. However, the baby's bassinet was clean. When I undressed the baby, I found that it was clean. Everything around the baby was filthy, but the girl had sterilised the baby's bottles in the Milton container - she was doing that properly. The baby was putting on weight. Everybody said that I should take the baby. I asked why, and said that the girl would only have another one. This girl had to be taught to be a parent. Young girls do not know automatically how to be a mum. At 15 years of age, it is a lot harder. However, I had to assess what I saw. I could easily have said that the girl was not looking after the baby, and that would have been that. However, that was not the case. I looked around, and the baby's needs were being met. It did not matter that the girl looked dirty and had bare feet, and that the house was dirty; the baby's needs were being met. Therefore, she was doing the right thing.

Trevor Craddock's article continues -

If we are to treat marriage or relationships as binding and of great importance, formal education about them should be essential, if not compulsory. Likewise on becoming a parent, formal education in parenting, which does exist, should be undertaken.

Under the previous Government, a lot of parenting classes were conducted. Under the current Government, I hope that those classes for parents will continue. The article continues -

Some people will say, “Oh, those who need it most would not bother.” That can be partly overcome by peer pressure. You only have to look at the effect of the anti-smoking and road toll ads to believe that ads pointing out the results of poor parenting and marriage behaviour would help break down the tragic situation we have today.

Debate adjourned, on motion by Hon Alan Cadby.