The Swedish translation of DSM-5 “Gambling Disorder”: Reflections on nosology and terminology

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In this commentary we discuss the translation into Swedish of the term Gambling Disorder (GD) in the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5; American Psychiatric Association, 2015). An earlier commentary in this journal described and discussed the translation into Finnish (Castrén, Salonen, Alho, & Lahti, 2014).

Translations and adaptions of psychiatric classifications across languages and cultures are not just a technical matter but require consideration of differences in conceptualisation of mental conditions and behaviours perceived to be harmful or undesirable (Fabrega, 1994; Lee, 1996; Millon, 1991). Psychiatric nosology is a taxonomic system in which mental disorders are classified and labelled. In themselves, the labels suggest the character of specific disorders. As components in a system, the labels distinguish disorders from each other and help to place them in a structure that reflects psychiatric theories. The names of the labels are chosen mainly on the basis of the meanings and associations they have in the field of psychiatry. However, the meanings and connotations of the names in everyday language and in various parts of society are also considered – there is a “dialectic between categories and experience” (Lee, 1996, p. 453). This dialectic is part of the societal context in which psychiatry is embedded; the etiology, symptomatology, treatment and overall perception of psychiatric disorders are influenced by moral judgements, social norms, cultural values and institutional structures specific to societies and cultures.

The DSM-5 is currently translated, or in the process of being translated, into 18 languages (American Psychiatric Publishing, 2014). The process of translation differs between languages but always involves psychiatric expertise. In Sweden the translation was carried out by the company Pilgrim Press, which is the publisher of the Swedish edition of the DSM. In this commentary we reflect on the result of the translation rather than its process. Furthermore, since the translation into Swedish of the diagnostic criteria is quite straightforward, our focus is on the term chosen for the disorder, which has been changed from spelmand (gambling/game mania) to hasardspelsyndrom (gambling syndrome).

We will first briefly outline the revisions in DSM-5 with regard to GD. Then we will discuss the challenges in translating “gambling” and “disorder” into Swedish, given the differences in the semantic fields of these terms in Swedish compared to English. Finally, we will comment on the suitability of the term hasardspelsyndrom from a theoretical perspective, in the context of Swedish health policy and how it might influence the discourse surrounding gambling in everyday language.
DSM and Gambling Disorder

The Swedish translation of the DSM-5 was published in early 2015 (APA, 2015). Previously published in the United States in May, 2013 (APA, 2013), the DSM-5 succeeded the DSM-IV (APA, 1994), which was published in 1994 with a text revision in 2000 (DSM-IV-TR). The DSM-IV-TR was translated into Swedish in 2002 (APA, 2002) and printed in 38,000 copies, a sizeable volume that indicates the importance of the DSM in Sweden.

Many diagnoses and terms have been changed in the new version of the DSM. As to pathological gambling, the process of revision resulted in four main changes. First, the name was changed from “pathological gambling” to Gambling Disorder, as “pathological” was considered to be an outdated and pejorative term (Petry, Blanco, Auriacombe, et al., 2013). Among the options considered were “problem gambling”, which was found inappropriate because it in many contexts denotes a sub-diagnostic condition, and “compulsive gambling”, which was dropped as the DSM uses “compulsive” to describe anxiety disorders. Second, one of the ten diagnostic criteria has been removed – “committed illegal acts to finance gambling”. Since individuals endorsing this criterion very often endorse many other criteria, it did not contribute much to diagnostic precision (Petry, Blanco, Auriacombe, et al., 2013). Third, the threshold for diagnosis has been lowered from five to four criteria, based on evidence that this would improve diagnostic accuracy (Petry, Blanco, Auriacombe, et al., 2013). An empirical evaluation showed that these two changes would improve the consistency of diagnosis (Petry, Blanco, Stinchfield, & Volberg, 2013). Finally, and most important, GD is no longer regarded to be an impulse control disorder but instead as being an addiction, included in the section “Substance-related and addictive disorders”.

Already in 2006, Nancy Petry (2006) argued that pathological gambling should be included among addictive behaviours. One main reason was the comorbidity between GD and substance use disorders, which is further corroborated by similarity in symptoms as well as common physiological and genetic underpinnings. Petry also argued that this common ground could open up research within the field of gambling. However, there were also arguments for not changing the placement of the diagnosis within the DSM-5, most prominently the fact that there is no intake of a substance that causes an effect on the user. A potential risk with including pathological gambling is that this might open the door for many other so-called behavioural addictions (such as shopping and sex addiction), which might erode the credibility of psychiatric diagnoses. In the end, these issues were resolved: the DSM-5 includes GD but excludes other behavioural addictions. The researchers and clinicians involved in revising the DSM concluded that there was sufficient evidence for including gambling disorder among the addictions but not enough evidence for identifying other behavioural addictions as mental disorders (APA, 2015, p. 481).

It should be noted, however, that Internet gaming disorder is included in Section 3 of the DSM-5, which lists “Emerging measures and models” requiring further research. A tentative description of the condition is offered with the intention to...
facilitate further studies (Petry & O’Brien, 2013). This might be the first step towards a common perspective on behavioural addictions. Such a perspective further increases the need of a translation of GD into other languages that is clear, precise and compatible with substance use disorders as well as with behavioural addictions that in the future might be included in the DSM.

In summary, two things should be considered when translating the term GD into other languages. First, the name chosen for the condition should not be pejorative or conflict with terms used in other sections of the DSM. Second, the name should indicate or at least be compatible with the notion of GD as a behavioural addiction. In the Swedish case, these considerations implied challenges in adapting nosological terminology to Swedish language and perceptions of mental disorders and conditions.

The terms gambling and problem gambling

An obvious challenge for the DSM translation is that Swedish lacks a term for the English “gambling”. When Swedes talk about gambling, we say spel, which is equivalent to the English word “game”. Context and established usage often make it clear if spel means gambling or playing games without staking money. For example, spelreglering means “gambling regulation” since it is an established term and there is no regulation of games more generally. Sometimes, however, it needs to be specified whether spel refers to game or gambling. For example, if someone talks about gambling being a problem among youth, he or she needs to say spel om pengar (game about money) to avoid confusion with problems relating to video and online games, such as World of Warcraft and Candy Crush Saga, i.e. internet gaming disorder. Finland Swedish (spoken in Finland by the Swedish-speaking population) has the word pengingspel (money game), but this word is almost never used in Sweden.

There are several terms in Swedish to denote problem gambling. We used the database Retriver Mediarkivet – Scandinavia’s largest digital news archive with articles from all Swedish national newspapers, most regional and local newspapers, as well as hundreds of journals and magazines – to estimate the relative prevalence in everyday language of such terms. The search covered three years, 2012, 2013 and 2014. The contexts of usage and the connotations of these terms have been explored earlier (Binde, 2013).

The most commonly occurring term in Swedish newspapers is spelberoende (present in 2029 articles), which means “Gambling addiction”. Sometimes the term is used to denote internet gaming disorder, but most often it refers to GD. “Gambling addiction” is the favoured term of many problem gamblers themselves. The “National society of gambling addicts” organises local mutual support societies and acts as a lobby group. This organisation, like many therapists and health professionals, view gambling addiction as a medical condition similar to addiction to alcohol, narcotics and other drugs. More generally, the concept of addiction has largely replaced the old notion in Sweden of excessive gambling as a vice or fault of character. This is an expression of the medicalisation in Western societies for half a century
of certain behaviours and conditions that used to be denounced and regarded in moral terms (Castellani, 2000; Ferentzy & Turner, 2012; Rosecrance, 1985) as well as of the globalisation of American psychiatric conceptualisations (Watters, 2010).

The second most common term used in Swedish newspapers is *spelmissbruk* (present in 1698 articles), which translates as “gambling abuse”. Also this term sometimes denotes internet gaming disorder. The term is used by lay people and many problem gamblers themselves, but is avoided by most health professionals. More generally in the Swedish health sector, the term “abuse” has over the past decades been increasingly regarded as improper, as it is perceived to carry connotations of social prejudice and to suggest that individuals are themselves responsible for their substance-related medical condition. “Use”, as in “drug use”, has increasingly replaced “abuse”.

*Spelproblem* (present in 443 articles) is the third most common term in Swedish newspapers; it means “gambling problems”. It appears to be a neutral term for the problems of varying severity that gambling can cause. In academic literature, however, the term is sometimes used to denote problems caused by gambling that are less severe than those caused by gambling addiction. It is seldom used to denote internet gaming disorder.

Far less common in Swedish newspapers is *spelmani* (present in only 17 articles). As mentioned earlier, this is the Swedish translation of the DSM-IV term “pathological gambling”, which translates as “gambling/game mania”. The term has thus been used almost exclusively in the psychiatric field and has not become part of colloquial Swedish. From a nosological point of view, the term *spelmani* has two semantic problems. First, the imprecise meaning of *spel*, which does not specify that the condition relates to gambling rather than internet gaming. Second, one of the exclusion criteria for pathological gambling in DSM-IV was (and still is in the DSM-5) that “The gambling behavior is not better accounted for by a Manic Episode”. Thus it was illogical to use the term “gambling mania” for a behaviour that expressively was to be distinguished from mania (Manic episode, included in the Mood Disorders).

In summary, in colloquial Swedish there is no term perfectly suited to be a translation of GD. *Spelberoende* (gambling/gaming addiction) comes close, but there is the problem with ambiguity of the term *spel*. The term that was used for pathological gambling in the DSM-IV translation, *spelmani*, is clearly inappropriate.

The term chosen for the current Swedish DSM translation is *hasardspelsyndrom*. This is a new compound word that seems never to have been used before in Swedish. The word did not appear in our search of Swedish newspaper articles from the past three years. *Hasard* or *hasardspel* are Swedish words that partly cover the meaning of “gambling”. Hazard was a dice game popular in Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Hazard was popular also in Sweden, and in an extended sense the word *hasard* has since then denoted gambling, in particular casino table games. However, the word *hasard* is not used very often in Swedish; it is principally used in a metaphoric sense as something risky that hinges on chance and is antonymic to controlled and rational action.
The advantage of using *hasardspel* in the DSM-5 translation is that it makes clear that the disorder relates to gambling, not video and online gaming. Furthermore, most Swedes are likely to associate the term with risky behaviour and the forms of gambling that in Sweden are most closely associated with problem gambling, i.e. casino games, poker and electronic gaming machines. Having thus concluded that *hasardspel* is in this context a reasonable translation of “gambling”, we will now discuss the second part of the term GD, i.e. “disorder” being translated into Swedish as “syndrome”.

**The terms disorder and syndrome**

The term “disorder” is used consistently in the DSM-5 for all conditions in the section “Substance-related and addictive disorders”. The Oxford Dictionary defines the word “disorder” as “an illness that disrupts normal physical or mental functions”. The word “illness” is in turn defined as “a disease or period of sickness affecting the body or mind”. Both “disorder” and “illness” are words without a pejorative connotation in English. However, *störning*, which is the Swedish translation of “disorder”, has a pejorative connotation much like the word “pathological” in English. The Swedish word *störning* would therefore be inappropriate to use in the context of problem gambling. The word suggests that something is abnormal in relation to a normal condition.

*Syndrom* is the term chosen to correspond to disorder. The Swedish word *syndrom* means the same as “syndrome” in English; the Oxford Dictionary defines “syndrome” as “a group of symptoms which consistently occur together, or a condition characterized by a set of associated symptoms”. This word is neutral in its associations and does not have the pejorative and stigmatising connotations of *störning*. The term *syndrom* is consonant with the terminology of the tenth edition of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-10, World Health Organization, 2007), which in clinical practice is more commonly used in Sweden than the DSM. Although the ICD-10 uses the term “pathological gambling”, all other addictions are labelled as a “dependence syndrome” (e.g. F10.2: “Mental and behavioural disorders due to use of alcohol: Dependence syndrome”).

A possible disadvantage of using the term *syndrom* is that few Swedes would associate it with addiction to gambling, alcohol or other substances. In Sweden, many among those working with the prevention and treatment of problem gambling were content when it became known that DSM-5 would regard excessive gambling as an addiction and no longer as an impulse control disorder. They hoped that this would make it easier for them to argue that problem gambling should be included in the national strategy for alcohol, narcotic drugs, doping and tobacco policy, and that treatment would be organised more effectively and given adequate resources. This has not changed in principle, as the structure of the Swedish DSM-5 translation follows the original – placing GD in the category of Substance-Related and Addictive Disorders – but the term “syndrome” does not directly indicate addiction.

**Closing comments**

Although the dictionary definition of words in different languages might be
the same or similar, their semantic fields may differ significantly. Words such as “disorder” and “addiction” have varying connotations across cultures and societies (Escobar & Vega, 2006; Room, 2006). Translating the terms in a psychiatric classification system is therefore a delicate task of reaching a compromise between nosologic precision and consistency on the one hand, and the necessity of using vernacular terms on the other. This was the case in translating the DSM-5 term GD into Swedish, as well as into Finnish (Castén, Salonen, Alho, & Lahti, 2014).

The Swedish term chosen – hasardspelsyndrom – is in several respects a clear improvement over spelmanni, the term used in the Swedish translation of DSM-IV. An advantage of the improvement in precision of the term is that it may become easier for Swedish gambling researchers to promote their research within a Swedish context since the term cannot be confused with internet gaming disorder.

From a theoretical and nosological point of view, the term “syndrome” has the advantage of suggesting that GD is not a fundamental psychiatric illness that can afflict human beings in all societies at all times in history. Obviously, GD cannot exist in societies where there is no gambling and presumably it exists mostly in societies where there is commercial gambling (Binde, 2005a, 2005b). Rather, GD is a syndrome – a specific condition with specific symptoms – that occurs in the conjunction between individual predispositions, social contexts, cultural values, behavioural reinforcement, neurobiological processes and commercial gambling.

However, the established term spelberoende – gambling addiction – is likely to remain the word used in colloquial Swedish for severe gambling problems that have the character of addiction. There are important stakeholders who wish to emphasise the similarity between addiction to gambling and addiction to alcohol and other drugs, and who prefer to use a simple word understood by all.

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