THIS MONTH

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Attitudes towards gambling and gambling reform in Australia

Phillip Donaldson, Matthew J. Rockloff, Matthew Browne, Casey-Marie Sorenson, Erika Langham and En Li

What was the research?
This research explored attitudes towards gambling and how they influence opinions on harm minimisation and gambling reform. The study considered whether the Attitudes Towards Gambling Scale, which has previously only been used in the United Kingdom, could be used in the Australian context. It also examined whether attitudes towards gambling were related to opinions about the gambling reforms proposed by the Commonwealth Government in 2012.

The study was conducted and funded by Central Queensland University.

How was the research conducted?
The study surveyed 1,773 Australian adults as part of one wave of the Australian Health and Social Sciences Survey – a longitudinal study of Australian adults administered by the Population Research Laboratory at Central Queensland University. Participants were recruited via telephone interviews and questions were administered online.

Participants were asked a series of questions covering:
- the questions in the Attitudes Towards Gambling Scale
- attitudes towards the Poker Machine Harm Reduction ($1 Bets and Other Measures) Bill 2012 and the Interactive Gambling and Broadcasting Amendment (Online Transactions and Other Measures) Bill 2011
- experiences of gambling and problem gambling.

Limitations
Attitudes towards gambling may vary significantly depending on the type of gambling, and may be different for a participant’s own gambling behaviour compared with gambling in general. Participants may not define gambling consistently. For example, many people do not consider scratch tickets or lottery tickets as forms of gambling. Despite these limitations, the study is useful in helping us understand general attitudes towards gambling and gambling reform.

What were key findings of the research?

Attitudes to Gambling Scale
- The Attitudes to Gambling Scale was successfully validated in the Australian context. Results for the Attitudes to Gambling Scale were similar to those observed in the original United Kingdom study. This means researchers can now have confidence in Australian findings that use this scale.
- The Attitudes to Gambling Scale was a useful predictor of attitudes towards gambling harm minimisation and reform.

General attitudes towards gambling
- Overall, findings indicated support for a public health approach to gambling, where regulation protects vulnerable people from developing gambling problems and reduces negative social and health consequences.
- Participants had moderately negative views of gambling, with only 12.5 per cent expressing positive views of gambling. Participants most strongly agreed with the statement that ‘there are too many opportunities for gambling nowadays’.
- Participants generally supported the right of individuals to gamble and did not support banning gambling altogether. However, participants tended to perceive gambling as dangerous for family life and harmful for society.
- Attitudes towards gambling were more positive among younger males, people with moderate to high disposable incomes, people who were more involved with gambling, and those who had started gambling at a young age. However, even in these groups, attitudes were generally negative.

Gambling was viewed negatively by the majority of participants. Only 12.5 per cent of participants had positive views about gambling.

Attitudes towards harm reduction and gambling reform measures
- Participants supported all of the gambling reform and harm minimisation measures studied.
- Participants moderately supported a $1 maximum bet for gaming machines, and banning advertisements of betting venues and online gambling sites during G-rated television programs and sports-related programs.
- Participants strongly supported:
  - banning gaming machines from accepting bank notes over $20
  - making it a criminal offence for players, coaches or umpires to influence the outcome of a sporting match to win money
  - prohibiting in-play betting.

Predicting attitudes towards harm reduction and gambling reform measures
- Demographic factors such as age or income were not strong predictors of attitudes towards gambling.
- Gambling activity was more strongly associated with attitudes towards gambling. Positive attitudes towards gambling were associated with increased gambling intensity (measured by frequent play, playing more products and having gambled recently).
- Being at risk of problem gambling was associated with more negative attitudes towards gambling and positive attitudes towards reform.
- The researchers found evidence that attitudes towards gambling are the key factors that influence gambling activity and attitudes towards reform.
How this research might be useful?
This research provides further evidence that there is widespread public concern about gambling, and that the public have negative attitudes towards gambling. However, the research also shows that people feel gambling is a right, and oppose banning it altogether. In short, it would appear that while people wish to be free to gamble, they are comfortable with its regulation. Further research and analysis should attempt to look for differences in attitudes towards different forms of gambling.

Participants in this study were supportive of a range of gambling reform measures in relation to poker machines and sports betting, including maximum bets for gaming machines and banning advertising for sports betting. Only a small percentage of respondents had positive views of gambling generally. This suggests there would be widespread support for further reform of gambling regulation.

Interestingly, participants at risk of problem gambling supported reform and exhibited more negative attitudes towards gambling.

It is perhaps unsurprising that increased involvement in gambling was associated with more positive attitudes towards gambling — a positive attitude would presumably make someone more likely to participate in gambling. However, it is interesting that those at risk of problem gambling had more negative attitudes towards gambling and were more supportive of reform. This group included those who were at low or moderate risk of problem gambling.

The study suggests respondents' negative attitudes towards gambling were likely to come from negative experiences with gambling. This is something to be expected in problem gamblers. Less is known about the experiences of at-risk groups and further research is required to confirm the study's findings.

This study indicates that risk of problem gambling may lead to negative experiences and attitudes towards gambling. Using experiences among at-risk groups to encourage safer gambling behaviours is an opportunity for the foundation.

Want to know more?
Read the full report from the study.

How to cite this research

Gambling in the mist of economic crisis: results from three national prevalence studies from Iceland
Daniel Thor Olason, Tobias Hayer, Tim Brosowski and Gerhard Meyer

What was the research?
This study compared three national gambling prevalence studies conducted in Iceland before and after the 2008 economic collapse. This comparative analysis was undertaken in an effort to gain further understanding about the potential effects of economic recession on gambling participation and problem gambling.

The research project was funded by the University of Iceland Lottery, the Icelandic Centre for Research (RANNIS) and the Ministry of the Interior of Iceland.

How was the research conducted?
The prevalence studies
The research examined results from three national gambling prevalence studies in Iceland conducted in 2005, 2007 and 2011. All three studies used the same research methodology:

• Participant recruitment — adults aged 18–70 years were drawn randomly from the national register and interviewed via telephone (both landline and mobile) by the Social Science Institute at the University of Iceland.

• Participant response — excluding ineligible respondents (due to death, illness, language problems or residence overseas), the response rates were considered satisfactory for each study — 69.8 per cent in 2005 (n= 3,358), 63.3 per cent in 2007 (n= 3,004) and 61.8 per cent in 2011 (n= 1,887).

• Gambling behaviour — respondents were asked about their participation in various types of gambling. More detail was elicited in the 2007 and 2011 studies.

• Problem gambling — the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI) was used to provide a measure of problem gambling in the past 12 months.

• Impact of economic crisis — in the 2011 study some additional questions were asked about respondents' experiences of the economic downturn.

Additional data preparation prior to the comparative analysis
Each of the three studies was weighted according to population figures for gender, age and residence at the time of the study. Data from the 2005 and 2007 studies was pooled due to relatively low differences between them. Other weightings and adjustments were applied to make valid comparisons of the data.


Limitations

- The data used in this study is based on self-reporting. Commonly noted limitations of self-reported information include problems with recall among respondents and giving deceptive or socially desirable answers due to content sensitivity.
- The study is based on comparisons between three prevalence studies that use a different sample of participants to estimate changes in gambling and problematic gambling behaviour at three points in time. Such a design is not as suitable to estimate changes across time as other designs that measure changes within individuals. The researchers cannot therefore exclude the possibility that individual differences in reaction or experience towards the economic collapse might cloud the results.

Strengths

- The methodology and measures of gambling and problem gambling in all three studies were the same.
- The response rate in all three studies was very satisfactory (over 60 per cent in each study), which should bolster the significance of this study’s findings.

What were key findings of the research?

In 2011 there were increases in most types of betting, including sports betting, skill games and lottery. Almost 10 per cent more Icelanders participated in very popular lottery, lotto. Playing electronic gaming machines (EGMs) was the only gambling form to drop significantly during the economic crisis.

**Playing of EGMs was the only form of betting to drop significantly during the economic crisis.**

Gambling prevalence

Current gambling prevalence rates in Iceland do not differ from other countries, including Australia. In 2011, 0.8 per cent of the Icelandic population were problem gamblers and 1.7 percent were moderate-risk gamblers.

Gambling participation

The study highlighted a general increase in gambling participation and problematic gambling during the economic crisis in Iceland.

- Total gambling rates increased from 67 per cent in 2007 to 76 per cent in 2011 – participation increased in most types of gambling including sports betting, lotteries and card games, and decreased on electronic gaming machines (EGMs).
- Problematic gambling – by moderate-risk, at-risk and problem gamblers – increased from 1.6 per cent to 2.5 per cent between 2005/2007 and 2011.

The increase in problematic gambling did not extend across demographic groups.

- The increase was driven by young males with no more than primary school education as their highest educational attainment. This group was more likely to have gambling problems in 2011 than in 2005/2007. The risk decreased with age or further education.
- The gambling activities most popular among young males in the study were card gambling and internet gambling.

**Participation in gambling during the economic recession increased in most types of gambling, except EGMs, and rates of problematic gambling also increased.**

Economic recession

- After controlling for gender, age and education, the authors concluded that economic recession produces a decrease in EGM gambling and an increase in lottery-type games.
- This finding expands on previous research that shows people who experience financial difficulties are more likely to buy lottery tickets than those who have no monetary concerns.
- The authors argue this supports the assumption that during financial hardship people perceive the possibility to win large jackpots as a means to improve their financial situation.

How this research might be useful

This study indicates that other situational or macro-social factors can affect gambling behaviour and participation in gambling. In particular, the study indicates that a downturn in economic circumstances or prospects increases the attractiveness of the possibility of winning large sums of money.

However, the decrease in EGM spending and no increase in spending on other expensive forms of gambling show that there is also a conservative response to reduced economic circumstances. This would indicate, contrary to many popular prejudices, that a great majority of those who gamble recognise it as an entertainment expense, not a substitute for work as a way to make money.

The findings from this study work against arguments that suggest providing money to those facing financial hardship may result in more spend on gambling activities.

Two questions do arise when applying these findings in an Australian context. The first concerns the degree to which Iceland and Australia have common cultures. This is an inquiry that cannot be answered here except to note both are broadly First World, Western cultures.

The second question concerns the high payouts and jackpots offered by Australian EGMs compared to elsewhere. The potential for very large wins was found in Iceland to drive lotto spend, despite, or even because of, the bad economic circumstances. It poses an interesting research question: whether the lure of high pokie returns in Australia may overcome a bad economic circumstances. It poses an interesting research question: whether the lure of high pokie returns in Australia may overcome a conservative reaction to economic insecurity.

Want to know more?

Read the full report from the study.

How to cite this research


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**RESEARCH UPDATE APRIL 2015**
A family affair: Indigenous women’s gambling journey
Laurie Morrison and Denise Wilson

What was the research?
This research explored how socio-cultural influences and motivations relate to Maori women’s gambling. Historically, Maori women’s gambling has not been studied independently but instead examined collectively with Maori men and Pasifika people. The research involved in-depth interviews focusing on Maori women who participated in an Indigenous gambling intervention program – Nga Pou Wahine Intervention.

This study was funded by the Health Research Council of New Zealand.

How was the research conducted?
The study recruited 35 out of 41 Maori women who were at the end or midway through counselling at gambling help services. Respondents participated in semi-structured interviews and submitted a copy of their program workbooks for the research.

Special approaches, including the implementation of cultural practices and consultation with local cultural advisors, were taken to ensure the research processes and practices were culturally appropriate and acceptable.

Data was analysed to identify themes. Cultural advice was obtained to make sure the analysis was culturally sensitive. Two counsellors and a community psychologist were also consulted and they confirmed the findings reflected Maori women’s perspectives and experiences of gambling.

Limitations
• The study was limited by the small sample size of 35 respondents.
• Respondents were participating in a culturally based gambling intervention, which may have influenced their responses.

What were key findings of the research?
The research identified the following five key themes that impact on the pathways of Maori women’s gambling:
• A family affair
• Planting the seed
• A living hell
• Escaping everyday reality
• Changing from within.

A family affair
‘A family affair’ refers to early exposure to gambling at family gatherings. Gambling was associated with having fun and the revenue from cards and ‘housey’ (also known as bingo) was used to help fulfil cultural responsibilities. For example, gambling revenue was used to maintain the gathering place and provide expenses for funerals. Gambling was also considered a means of supplementing basic needs.

Planting the seed
‘Planting the seed’ refers to women’s early learning about and participation in gambling with parents and other family members. Card gambling and housey were linked to Maori women (mothers, grandmothers and aunts) while horse racing was linked to Maori men (fathers, brothers and uncles). Participation in gambling usually began after observing big wins from friends.

Revenue from card gambling, a form of gambling associated with Maori women, was used to help fulfil cultural responsibilities.

A living hell
‘A living hell’ refers to the hardship and traumatic events these women were exposed to and experienced, including violence, physical and sexual abuse and abandonment.

These experiences resulted in low self-esteem, a sense of disempowerment, feelings of disconnection, low resilience, reduced well-being and increased vulnerability to gambling problems.

Escaping everyday reality
‘Escaping everyday reality’ details how gambling problems developed for the respondents. Gambling was used by Maori women to escape and ease the pressure of their daily lives. It provided a mechanism of doing repeated tasks with a hope of winning some money to supplement their day-to-day expenses or even a hope of a big win to change their situation.

Changing from within
‘Changing from within’ describes the journey of recovery from problem gambling. The research highlighted that recovery began with self-awareness of the issue and readiness to take responsibility for and address a gambling problem.

How this research might be useful
This study’s insights highlight the usefulness of adopting a culturally sensitive approach in understanding sources of problems with gambling. Understanding the particular ways in which gambling is normalised and the context in which it takes place has implications for both prevention and treatment.

The study describes not only pathways into gambling and gambling problems but also pathways out of gambling. It supports the argument that self-awareness and readiness to change, as well as continuous culturally appropriate support, are essential for recovery and preventing relapse into gambling problems.

These findings may assist community organisations and educators working with Maori women and problem gamblers to better understand the background of these women, and may inform best practice in intervention and prevention programs.

Want to know more?
Read the full report from the study.

How to cite this research
An exploratory study of gambling operators’ use of social media and the latent messages conveyed

Sally Gainsbury, Paul Delfabbro, Daniel King and Nerilee Hing

What was the research?

This study examined the use of social media for marketing and advertising purposes by a range of gambling operators in Australia. The study examined the following two research questions:

- How do gambling operators use social media to promote gambling activities?
- What latent messages are conveyed?

The study was commissioned by Gambling Research Australia.

How was the research conducted?

An audit of the websites and social media pages of 101 gambling operators in Australia was conducted over four weeks in October 2013. The audit included:

- all casino operators in Australia
- all lottery operators in Australia
- the 10 largest electronic gaming machine (EGM) venues in each state and territory
- the 12 largest wagering providers (based on total annual turnover) in Australia.

The audit recorded the following information for each gambling operator:

- name and owner of the gambling operation or venue
- types of gambling offered
- use of social media (Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, YouTube, Google+) for promotions and communication with followers
- level of social media interest (number of likes, subscribers and followers)
- type of content promoted via social media platforms
- nature and use of responsible gambling messages via social media.

The researchers then analysed the audit content to identify themes in the messages conveyed via social media. The aim of this analysis was not to quantify the messages used but rather to capture the range of messages conveyed.

Limitations

Only operators licensed and regulated within Australia were included.

What were key findings of the research?

Use of social media

- The majority of operators (87 per cent) had a Facebook page.
- Approximately half (52.2 per cent) of operators had a Twitter account.

- Less than one-third (29.7 per cent) of all operators self-promoted using YouTube, however, the majority (83.3 per cent) of online wagering operators used YouTube.
- One in 10 operators used Google+.
- Use of Facebook was consistent across different types of gambling operators.
- Twitter was used more often by online betting agencies and lottery providers.
- Use of social media was highest among online wagering sites, followed by casino operators and then EGM venues.

Facebook was the most popular form of social media used by gambling operators in Australia, followed by Twitter, YouTube and Google+.

Social media and promotional content

Types of content posted on social media included:

- information about the venue or operator
- gambling products and special offers (for example, venues posted information about jackpots to be won)
- competitions and promotions
- gambling wins by customers
- features to assist betting (for example, new payment systems to make gambling easier like a pre-paid Casino Cash Card)
- betting tips
- sports and racing news
- in-venue events (for example, trivia nights and function rooms for birthday parties)
- food and beverage
- encouraging customer engagement on social media by following, liking and content
- links to sports teams
- promoting community engagement (for example, donations to community groups).

Responsible gambling

The audit revealed little incorporation of responsible gambling messages or provision of information on responsible gambling or problem gambling in social media content posted by Australian gambling operators.

A minority of operators (11.9 per cent) had information about responsible gambling or problem gambling services in their social media content.

Messages

The following messages promoted via social media were identified from the analysis. These messages have the potential to increase the public health risks posed by gambling promotion:

- raising awareness (for example, information about the gambling operator’s brand and products)
- encouraging and normalising gambling (for example, depicting the card game baccarat as glamorous and fast-moving)
- emphasising ease of use (for example, explaining how to place a bet or play a particular game)
• encouraging new use (for example, through information on ‘trialling’ a product)
• emphasising winning by promoting jackpot and prize amounts
• encouraging venue patronage through promotion of in-venue events
• encouraging betting by providing expert tips
• aligning gambling with sport by linking bets with sporting events
• cultivating brand engagement (for example, through the promotion of non-gambling content)
• promoting community benefits of gambling
• providing limited warning messages or responsible gambling messages.

Less than 12 per cent of gambling operators provided responsible gambling information on their social media sites.

The analysis overwhelmingly demonstrated that gambling was depicted in a positive light. Some gambling operators’ posts described gambling as ‘glamorous,’ ‘exciting’ and ‘fun.’ Other posts appealed to audiences by providing information on recent winners and opportunities to win. Furthermore, gambling operators regularly posted about the benefits to the community made possible by the venue. For example, operators provided information on amounts of money donated to local community organisations and sporting groups.

Information provided on sports and racing events are contributing to the ‘gamblification of sport’.

The analysis also demonstrated a link between gambling and sport, described by the authors of the study as ‘gambling’s natural alignment with sport’ and the ‘sportification of gambling.’ This link is concerning as young adult males who are most at risk of developing a problem with gambling are the clear target audience for posts about sportsbetting promotions.

How this research might be useful
The minimal restrictions on social media use, inherent difficulties in monitoring social media and widespread use among youth, suggest that ongoing research is needed to monitor the impacts of gambling marketing via social media on young people.

The high use of social media by gambling operators to promote gambling products raises questions about the impact reminders and inducements to gamble may have on vulnerable populations.

The audit revealed a lack of responsible gambling content posted by Australian gambling operators on their social network pages. It is unclear whether responsible gambling messages must be included on social network posts and content pages. Current advertising codes of conduct do not explicitly state responsible gambling messages should be included in social media content. Given the increasing use of social media and how it is being used, this study highlights the need for regulatory reform as it outlines the gaps in current regulation.

The identification of particular messages provides the basis for further research to better understand the impact of social media use by gambling operators. In particular, the impact of social media on venue patronage and the uptake of gambling by consumers.

Want to know more?
Read the full report from the study.

How to cite this research