THIS MONTH

Do advertising and promotions for online gambling increase gambling consumption? An exploratory study (2)
Gambling expenditure predicts harm: evidence from a venue-level study (3)
A qualitative investigation of the experiences, attitudes and beliefs about gambling in the Chinese and Tamil communities in Victoria (4)
Prevalence of gambling problems among the clients of a Toronto homeless shelter (6)
Do advertising and promotions for online gambling increase gambling consumption? An exploratory study

Nerilee Hing, Lorraine Cherney, Alex Blaszczynski, Sally M. Gainsbury and Dan I. Lubman

What was the research?

This article explores the relationship between advertising and promotions and the consumption of online gambling.

The research was conducted by a team led by Nerilee Hing of the Centre for Gambling Education and Research at Southern Cross University.

The research was funded through Gambling Research Australia as part of the Interactive Gambling project. More findings from the Interactive Gambling project are found in the January and May research updates.

How was the research conducted?

This project used semi-structured interviews with online gamblers to investigate the effects of advertising and promotions for online gambling. The study included two groups of participants:

- 50 online gamblers who were not seeking treatment but were low to high risk for problem gambling were recruited from a database of participants from a previous study and
- 31 online gamblers who were seeking treatment for a gambling problem were recruited by the gambling helplines in four Australian jurisdictions as well as through ads on Gambling Help Online and Google.

Semi-structured interviews with participants were conducted by telephone for approximately 30 to 60 minutes. The full interview schedule is available in the Interactive Gambling report. Interview questions examined:

- the history of using both land-based and online gambling forms
- features of online gambling contributing to gambling problems and
- experiences around receiving and responding to online gambling advertising and promotions.

The data was analysed using a thematic approach and was divided into the following five themes:

- attracting new players
- increasing gambling by existing users
- triggering gambling by problem gamblers attempting to curtail gambling
- attracting lapsed users and
- causing longer gambling sessions.

Limitations

This study relies on the gambler’s self reported experiences of advertising. Given that individuals are often unaware of the effects of advertising, it is likely the effects are greater than demonstrated in this study.

This was a small, qualitative study aimed at understanding the experiences of gamblers in depth. Further research is required to confirm the findings of this study.

Note the methodology for this study is described somewhat differently in the Interactive Gambling report, and the analysis process is not described in detail in either the article or the report.

What were key findings of the research?

- Only a small minority of participants gambled for the first time on the internet. Most started gambling on land-based forms of gambling.
- Some, but not all, participants became aware of internet gambling through advertising and promotions.
- Advertising and promotions prompted a number of existing land-based gamblers to shift to online gambling and encouraged existing online gamblers to gamble more frequently.
- Advertising and promotions also encouraged a small number of participants to take up additional types of gambling, or to take up gambling for the first time.
- Promotions of online gambling were found to be particularly effective in prompting increased gambling among people who were seeking treatment for gambling problems. The participants who were seeking treatment reported they were...
Participants in treatment were critical of online gambling promotions, describing them as "deceptive", "insidious" or a way to "suck you in".

Previous research has suggested the role of online gambling is to attract players from competitors, rather than increase overall consumption of online gambling. However, this study concludes that advertising does increase consumption of online gambling, particularly through encouraging existing gamblers to take up new forms of gambling and increasing consumption among existing online gamblers.

Advertising and promotions prompted gamblers to shift to online gambling and to gamble more often.

How this research might be useful?

This study provides evidence that advertising and promotions for online gambling can have the effect of increasing gambling consumption, and people in treatment for gambling problems may be particularly vulnerable to advertising and promotions for online gambling.

Therefore, an effect of gambling advertising and promotions may be the undermining of responsible gambling. Although Victoria does not allow promotions for gambling in the form of inducements there have been enforcement issues in relation to companies operating interstate.

Federal policy-makers may consider this research if examining the regulation of online gambling and gambling advertising.

The findings of this study also suggest advertising and promotions for online gambling may be an appropriate target for prevention efforts for problem gambling. However, further research is required to confirm the findings of this study.

Want to know more?

The full report from the study is available from International Gambling Studies.

How to cite this research


Gambling expenditure predicts harm: evidence from a venue-level study

Francis Markham, Martin Young & Bruce Doran

What was the research?

This study investigates the relationship between gambling expenditure and the prevalence of gambling-related harm. The aim of the study was to test the Total Consumption Theory of gambling – a theory which suggests increased gambling expenditure is related to increased gambling-related harm at a population level.

The research was supported by an Australian Postgraduate Award awarded to Francis Markham, the Community Benefit Fund of the Northern Territory Government and the Australian Research Council Project LP0990584. In addition, the Northern Territory Department of Justice provided the electronic gaming machine (EGM) expenditure data for analysis.

How was the research conducted?

This study examined 62 venues in the urban centres of the Northern Territory, Australia. To investigate the relationship between gambling expenditure and gambling-related harm, the study required:

- Prevalence rates of gambling-related harm at individual venues
  - A questionnaire was mailed to 46,263 urban centre households asking for information about which gambling venues the respondent had visited in the last month.
  - The prevalence of gambling-related harm for each venue was estimated by allocating individual respondents to the venue they had visited most frequently.
- Average EGM expenditure of adult residents at individual venues
  - EGM expenditure data for each venue was obtained from the Northern Territory Department of Justice.
- The number of adults in the service area of individual venues
  - The service area population of each venue was estimated using the Huff model – a probabilistic method for calculating trading areas and their populations.

Correlation analysis and multivariate binomial regression were then applied to investigate the relationship between the rates of gambling-related harm and average EGM expenditure.

Limitations

This research is subject to the following potential non-sampling errors:

- Error from the estimations of populations in venue service areas may result in over/under estimations of average EGM expenditure.
- Non-random distributions of household income by venue service areas may affect the result. As gamblers with less household income were assumed to experience gambling-related harms at lower levels of expenditure, this may result in the underestimation of the strength of the expenditure-harm relationship.
- Estimated average expenditure for the majority of venue visitors (98%) was less than $150 AUD. Therefore, the expenditure-harm relationship beyond an average of $150 AUD of EGM expenditure would be questionable.
What were key findings of the research?

This study found EGM expenditure is positively associated with the prevalence of gambling-related harm at venue level — therefore supporting the Total Consumption Theory of gambling.

- The prevalence of gambling-related harm at a club with the median of 22 EGMs is estimated to increase from nine per cent to 18 per cent as the monthly EGM expenditure per adult rises from $10 AUD to $150 AUD.
- Each $20 AUD increase in monthly EGM expenditure per adult is associated with an estimated 1.7 per cent increase in the prevalence of gambling harm for a club with 22 EGMs.

Increases in general gambling expenditure were shown to be associated with increases in harm.

How this research might be useful?

The findings of this study show increases in expenditure data can be used to estimate changes in gambling-related harm over time at a population level.

Although this is a cross-sectional study and does not imply causation, the research provides empirical evidence for the positive association between excessive gambling expenditure and gambling related harm at venue level. It could be expected this information would be useful to regulators and local governments making assessments of gambling-related harm at local levels.

The authors have justified the use of expenditure data to estimate changes in gambling-related harm over time at a population level. However, caution must be used when replicating the study as the relationship between expenditure and rates of harm is likely to vary between jurisdictions due to environmental, regulatory and social differences.

In the situation of local government areas, where local evidence of gambling-related harm is lacking, this study provides a welcome indicative basis for better assessments of likely harm caused by increased expenditure.

Want to know more?

The full report from the study is located here.

How to cite this research


A qualitative investigation of the experiences, attitudes and beliefs about gambling in the Chinese and Tamil communities in Victoria

Susan Feldman, Harriet Radermacher, Christopher Anderson & Marissa Dickins

What was the research?

This study examined experiences, attitudes and beliefs about gambling among two culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities in Victoria, Australia - the Chinese and Tamil communities.

The research examined the perception of gambling activities within these communities. The impact of migration and the role of culture are examined in relation to attitudes and perceptions about gambling. How this context then interacts with a willingness and ability to seek help by gamblers in the communities is also explored.

This study was funded by the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation through the Grants for Gambling Research Program.

How was the research conducted?

This study was conducted in two stages. The first stage involved individual or small group semi-structured interviews with 18 participants referred to as key informants. These included community service providers and leaders from the Chinese and Tamil communities. These interviews informed the next stage through recruitment of participants as well as establishing an interview framework.

The second stage involved individual interviews and one focus group of eight with community members from the Chinese and Tamil communities.

The data was analysed using a thematic approach and was divided into the following five key themes:

- gaming, gambling and culture
- influences on gambling
- help-seeking
- impact on gambling and
- vulnerable groups.

Limitations

This study used purposeful sampling whereby participants were intentionally selected. The purposive nature of the sample means it is not representative. However this may be seen as an acceptable trade-off in an area where there has been little previous work that could create a foundation for a more random or quantitative approach.

Approximately between a quarter and a half of the participants were gamblers. Therefore, this study can tell us very little about
how members of the Chinese and Tamil communities who regularly gamble think or behave. The reports of attitudes and behaviours to gambling highlighted in this study are mostly second hand.

What were key findings of the research?

The attitudes, experiences and beliefs about gambling in both the Tamil and Chinese communities varied widely and, while the research found some common themes, the perceptions of all participants were very nuanced.

Attitudes and perceptions:

• The Chinese and Tamils have different attitudes towards gambling:
  - The Tamils do not see gambling as a part of their culture and frown on it as an ‘immoral’ activity to engage in.
  - The Chinese have more nuanced views about gambling. They refer to some forms of gambling as ‘gaming’ (ie. card games). Gaming is seen as a legitimate social activity and part of their cultural identity. However, once a community member suffers harm from gaming, the activity is referred to as gambling and becomes shameful.

• Both communities find the casino appealing, because it:
  - is glamorous and Australian
  - has food and staff that are culturally appropriate
  - is an entertainment activity hub and
  - helps overcome social isolation, particularly since English language proficiency is not needed.

While the Chinese and Tamil communities have different attitudes towards gambling, both communities found the Crown casino appealing.

• Both communities indicated the migration experience contributed to perceptions of gambling with their community:
  - Relocation to Australia was associated with feelings of freedom, including freedom to gamble
  - The experience was sometimes associated with stress, social isolation, low level of English proficiency or difficult situations in countries of origin, which some reported led to more positive perceptions of gambling (particularly at the casino)

Observations regarding help-seeking for both communities:

Stigma and shame related to saving face and facing family condemnation, including from bringing shame on family, act as barrier to help seeking:

• Because the shame of an individual is reflected on their family, it will often be another family member who initiates help seeking.
• A lack of understanding of Western concepts of counselling and psychological help are barriers to help seeking.
• In addition, a lack of understanding of the rules of confidentiality in counselling also acts as a barrier to help seeking.
• Feelings that counsellors will lack an understanding of their culture and therefore of themselves also creates a barrier to help seeking.

How this research might be useful?

This study contributes to the small amount of research conducted on gambling in CALD communities. In particular, research involving gambling and the Chinese community in Victoria is very small while research on the Victorian Tamil community is non-existent. Therefore, this study provides a window of understanding into the cultural beliefs, attitudes and experiences about gambling within these two communities. Although, this study is limited in its application as the participant sample size was small and did not contain many gamblers, the study does provide analysis and observations that are vital for individuals and organisations working with members of these communities.

The findings of this study will be of particular assistance in designing and delivering help and support to Chinese and Tamil people with gambling issues. It should also provide insights useful to those making educational materials for these audiences.

Methodologically the study may also serve as a model for future research around other CALD communities.

Want to know more?

The full report from the study is located on the foundaton’s website.

How to cite this research

Prevalence of gambling problems among the clients of a Toronto homeless shelter

Flora I. Matheson, Kimberly Devotta, Aklilu Wendaferew and Cheryl Pedersen

What was the research?
This study examined the lifetime prevalence of at-risk, problem and pathological gambling among clients of a homeless service agency in Toronto, Canada.

The objective of the study was to estimate the prevalence of problem gambling among these clients, thereby adding to the limited research within this field.

The study was conducted by researchers at the Centre for Research on Inner City Health, Keenan Research Centre at St Michael’s Hospital in Toronto, Canada. Ethics approval for the study was obtained from St. Michael’s Hospital Research Ethics Board.

How was the research conducted?
This study interviewed 264 clients from the Good Shepherd Centre (GSC) — a community based organisation in Toronto which provides a range of services for homeless.

As most clients use GSC services on a drop-in basis, no list existed for the researchers to use as a base for recruitment. Therefore, the researchers employed a time/location method to recruit participants where clients were approached at specific times and during particular programs (ie. meal times).

Interviews lasted one to 10 minutes. Participants were initially asked whether they had ever gambled in their life. If no, the participant was not asked any further questions. If yes, the participant was screened using the NORC Diagnostic Screen for Disorders (NODS) to assess lifetime gambling related problems. The screener then asked a series of questions related to loss of control, lying and preoccupation to screen out non-problem gamblers. Those who answered yes to one of the selection questions were asked the remaining NODS questions.

What were key findings of the research?
Findings from this study suggest an alarming rate of lifetime problem gambling (10 percent) and pathological gambling (25 percent) within the sample population.

Key Findings
- Almost 15% of the sample had never gambled during their lifetime (n = 39)
- Close to 43% were non-problem gamblers (n = 113)
- 8% were at-risk of problem gambling (n = 22)
- 10% met the criteria for lifetime problem gambling (n = 25)
- 25% met the criteria for lifetime pathological gambling (n = 65)
- Among those who gambled, 58% were lifetime pathological gamblers (n = 65)
- Among those who gambled, 42% were at risk of or met the criteria for lifetime problem gambling (n = 47)

How this research might be useful?
This study adds to the small body of research on the prevalence of problem and pathological gambling among clients of community services.

The successful recruitment of participants during drop-in and meal programs provides a design framework for future intervention programs which could be structured around the flow of these particular programs.

In addition, the findings in this study add to the limited work already conducted in this area suggesting that gambling should be included in initial assessments by social service agencies as gambling-related homelessness builds over time.

Want to know more?
The full report from the study is located here.

How to cite this research

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Inquiries
contact@responsiblegambling.vic.gov.au
The Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation
Level 6, 14-20 Blackwood Street
North Melbourne, Victoria 3051
Australia
(03) 9452 2600