

About the Conceptual Framework

WHAT IS THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF HARMFUL GAMBLING?

This Framework is a summary of the major factors that have been associated with harmful gambling. It takes a broad perspective by considering the risks and effects of harmful gambling at multiple levels. These include the individual, family, community, and society.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

While many people gamble for leisure and do not have a gambling problem, gambling can have a serious impact on some individuals. Further, the gambler's family and community may also experience negative effects. This Framework provides a comprehensive overview of the factors known to be linked to harmful gambling. It is written collaboratively by international experts, with the evidence being drawn from different countries and scientific disciplines.

KEY OBJECTIVES

The Framework has three key objectives:

1. Reflect on what is currently known about the factors that contribute to harmful gambling.
2. Assist stakeholders (e.g., treatment providers, policy makers, the public) in better understanding the complex issue of harmful gambling. This may lead to making decisions that are better informed.
3. Guide future research by identifying areas where research is most needed.

Gambling Research Exchange Ontario (GREO) is committed to improving the Framework continually. The first edition was published in Spring 2013. Since then, various updates have been made. The current edition is not meant to be an exhaustive review of all published research. However, it does cite important, original research studies and reviews that had been identified at the time of publication.

DEFINING GAMBLING

Gambling is wagering money or something of material value on an event with an uncertain outcome. The hope is to win more money or material goods. The definition of gambling is likely to change as the norms around gambling change in different societies and cultures.

- › *Commercial gambling* is formal and regulated by laws, and is the focus of this Framework. As a group, the gamblers always lose money to the gambling provider. Thus, there is an unequal relationship between the gambling provider and the gamblers.
- › *Private gambling* occurs in informal social settings, such as between friends. Therefore, money is redistributed within the group.
- › *Recreational gambling* is gambling for leisure or entertainment in a low-risk manner. It has little to no impact on a person's well-being, and may result in some benefits. Recreational gambling is also called social, responsible, healthy, or leisure gambling.
- › *Illegal gambling* is not bound by laws or regulations. The relationship between the gambling provider and the gamblers is also unequal. However, the gambling provider is not bound by laws to pay the winners or to collect debts through legitimate means.
- › *Gaming* is different from gambling in that gaming outcomes can be achieved by skill whereas gambling outcomes are determined by chance. Some games include elements of gambling (e.g., gambling scenarios), and some gambling activities have game-like elements (e.g., skill-based slot machines).
- › *Harmful gambling* is any repetitive gambling that results in harm. The degree of harm can range from minor to significant, and harm can be episodic or chronic. The Framework defines harmful gambling as including the full spectrum of gambling from the least severe to most severe forms. Harmful gambling is also called problem gambling, compulsive gambling,

irresponsible gambling, pathological gambling, or gambling disorder.

VALUE OF THE FRAMEWORK

This Framework adds value in several ways:

- › The Framework uses harm as the organizing principle. It moves beyond the view of harmful gambling as something experienced by individuals only. Instead, it offers a broader perspective by considering harm to the person, family, community, and society. Thus, the Framework can readily be linked to public health and mental health promotion, as well as to community development.
- › The Framework highlights areas where there is strong evidence and where there is not.
- › The Framework offers a comprehensive overview of the factors, but it does not commit to any particular theory or model. By doing so, it urges researchers and others to pursue new, theory-driven research.
- › The Framework promotes a harm reduction approach to gambling. Harm reduction refers to decreasing harm or increasing safety related to gambling. It focuses on empowering people who are negatively affected by gambling and working toward protecting people and the community.
- › The Framework enables a consideration of the costs and benefits of gambling to the gambler, family, community, and society.

OVERVIEW OF GAMBLING

The Framework presents eight major factors, which are grouped into two topics:

1. *Gambling specific factors* include gambling environment, gambling exposure, gambling types, and gambling resources.
2. *General factors* include cultural, social, psychological, and biological factors.

Each factor is outlined in greater detail in its own section. The factors may or may not interact to affect gambling behaviour.

HARMFUL GAMBLING AND GAMBLING-RELATED HARM

A Taxonomy of Harms has been developed by Australian researchers to categorize gambling harm. It proposes seven harm dimensions that result directly or indirectly from gambling: financial, emotional, relationship disruption, physical health, work performance, criminal, and cultural. It further proposes three harm stages:

- › *General harms* are minor harms that occur after a person begins to gamble.
- › *Crisis harms* are severe enough for the person to believe that he or she has a gambling problem.
- › *Legacy harms* are long-term effects which may persist even if the person stops gambling.

The Taxonomy of Harms has considerable overlap with the factors outlined in this Framework. Further, both consider harm across the full spectrum of gambling.

RELEVANCE TO STAKEHOLDERS

The Framework is intended for a broad audience. There are three main stakeholder groups:

- › *Researchers:* The Framework could be used as a reference to prominent areas of research and as a guide to future research.
- › *Treatment providers:* The Framework could be used to present to other agencies, funders, and clients. It could be connected to public health and the social and economic conditions that influence health.
- › *Government:* The Framework highlights how environments and gambling products contribute to harmful gambling. It also draws attention to the challenges that treatment providers face and the need for a variety of harm prevention and treatment strategies.

This is a summary of the Conceptual Framework of Harmful Gambling. To learn more, please refer to the [full report](#) or visit the [Conceptual Framework of Harmful Gambling webpage](#) on the GREO website.