



Social Factors

WHAT IS THIS FACTOR ABOUT?

Social factors refer to how relationships, demographics, and social structures, such as culture and environment, can impact gambling harm.

WHY IS THIS FACTOR IMPORTANT?

Social factors shape attitudes and beliefs about gambling, harmful gambling, and the best ways to prevent or reduce harm. Some social factors can help protect a person from developing gambling problems, while others can increase a person's risk of developing gambling problems. For example, it may be protective to be in a close relationship with someone who rarely gambles; but, a close relationship with someone who gambles regularly can lead to a person gambling more than they might do otherwise.

WHAT TOPICS ARE INCLUDED IN THIS FACTOR?

Social Demographics

A number of studies have found that gambling problems are more common in men, people who are single, under the age of 30, low income, low education, and who live in a large city. Other research found that certain jobs are linked to higher rates of problem gambling. These are usually blue-collar jobs (e.g., a taxi driver or someone who works in sales), where there may be flexible hours, cash on hand, or easy access to gambling venues.

In Canada, Australia, and England, researchers are exploring the relationship between gambling problems and homelessness. This research may bring some awareness to the impact of housing insecurity on gambling participation and other

addictions. More studies are needed to understand the relationship between gambling and wealth, job stress, and unemployment.

Family and Peer Gambling Involvement

Family members influence a person's gambling behaviours. Loved ones can contribute to or prevent gambling problems. Studies have shown higher rates of gambling participation and harm among adolescents who lived with a parent who gambled. Parenting style can also influence an adolescent's gambling participation. For example, studies suggest that gambling problems are less likely to occur if a parent is more authoritative and closely monitors his or her child's behaviour.

Peers can also influence a person's gambling behaviour. For example, having peers that are antisocial may increase an adolescents' risk of developing gambling problems. Having "gambling friends", or friends who share only gambling as a common interest, can also increase a person's gambling participation. If a person's "gambling friends" tend to take more risks when gambling, they may also bet outside of their financial limits.

Many people with gambling problems are reluctant to seek formal treatment and may instead turn to family and friends for support. Families approach these situations in different ways though; so although some may be helpful, others can reduce the chances of their loved one obtaining proper treatment and support depending on the strategy used.

Researchers are beginning to look at how intimate partner relationships influence gambling behaviour. Some studies have found that problem gambling is related to violence in intimate partner relationships and child abuse. The connection between gambling and being a victim of partner violence is thought to be



influenced by being of a younger age, not being employed full-time, and having anger or substance use issues.

Education System

Youth who engage in informal gambling activities often become regular commercial gamblers once they turn 18. The education system can be used to teach students about the risks and benefits of gambling. There are only a small number of studies that have examined students' knowledge and attitudes towards gambling, and the influence of educational strategies on preventing problem gambling. Existing studies in this area are not representative; they only focus on youth between 12 and 18 years, and they do not assess long-term outcomes of gambling participation. There are also concerns that educators will not adopt gambling prevention strategies, as not all educators view gambling as a problem activity.

Neighbourhood

Access to gambling opportunities varies across neighbourhoods. Evidence shows that gambling venues are often located in neighbourhoods with fewer resources and lower levels of trust, social connections, and influence. The people who live in neighbourhoods with easy access to venues are more likely to participate in gambling and may go on to develop gambling problems. Gambling operators may find it easier to locate venues in neighbourhoods like these because residents are less likely to protest. Given this strong connection between access to gambling opportunities and gambling problems, future prevention efforts should address the local context, as well as the individual.

Stigmatization

Stigmatization is the experience of being treated poorly due to a specific characteristic (e.g., excessive gambling). It often leads to being excluded, avoided, or shunned by others. In this way, stigmatization acts as a powerful form of social control. Opportunities and social relations are more limited for people experiencing stigmatization. There is some evidence to suggest that certain cultures stigmatize more than others, and that women experience more

stigma than men. There is limited research, however, about the impact stigmatization has on gambling participation and related harms.

The general public often views people with gambling problems as being compulsive, risk-taking, greedy, irrational, and/or antisocial. At the same time though, gambling problems may also be seen as an addiction and not as a feature of a person's character. If someone does have gambling problems and they fear being stigmatized, they may not disclose their problem to others or seek treatment.

Deviance

Deviance is a behaviour that goes against social norms. Some people view deviant behaviour as a medical condition. This view dates back to the 1970's, and underlies some of the biological and psychological approaches to gambling research.

Although research on gambling as a deviant behaviour is rare, some researchers believe that it may be caused by an underlying behavioural syndrome. One study found high rates of deviant behaviour in groups of friends that gambled informally. Another study found high rates of problem gambling in prison populations. In many cases, both harmful gambling and criminal behaviour were driven by personality factors like impulsiveness, sensation-seeking, and high levels of risk-taking.

People who commit crimes may do so to obtain money to support their regular gambling. For example, a study in Denmark found problem gambling to be associated with economic crimes and drug charges. A link has also been found between gambling problems and embezzlement in the workplace.

This is a summary of the social factor, one of eight interrelated factors that comprise the Conceptual Framework of Harmful Gambling. To learn more about this factor, please refer to the [full report](#) or visit the [social factor webpage](#) on the GREO website.