knowledge snapshot

The Conceptual Framework of Harmful Gambling

What this article is about

This article is a summary of the Conceptual Framework of Harmful Gambling completed in 2018. The Framework was developed by a team of international experts and facilitated by Gambling Research Exchange (GREO). It considers the risks and effects of harmful gambling at the individual, family and community levels. Harmful gambling is any repetitive gambling behaviour that leads to harm. Harm can be episodic or chronic, and can range from mild to severe. The Framework has three key objectives:

1) To reflect current knowledge on factors that can contribute to harmful gambling.
2) To assist stakeholders in better understanding the complex issue of harmful gambling and inform decision making.
3) To guide future research programs by identifying areas where research is most needed.

What was done?

The Framework was first developed in 2013 by GREO with a team of international experts. It is regularly updated to reflect changes in the gambling landscape, current issues, and new understandings. The Framework is now in its third edition. GREO is responsible for organizing updates and knowledge translation and exchange (KTE). KTE refers to the process of making knowledge available in an accessible manner, so that a broader audience can use it to take action and make decisions.

What you need to know

The Framework presents eight major factors that are grouped into gambling-specific and general factors.

Why is this article important?

This article is a summary of the latest version of the Conceptual Framework of Harmful Gambling. The Framework presents eight major factors that contribute to harmful gambling. Four factors are gambling-specific including gambling environment, exposure, gambling types, and gambling resources. The other four are general factors including cultural, social, psychological, and biological factors. The Framework also highlights current gaps in knowledge and areas for future research.

Each major factor has several subfactors. Some were updated from the previous edition. Others were added as new information became available.

1) Gambling-specific factors

Gambling environment refers to the broader environment in which gambling occurs. *Economics* looks at the macro-level impacts of gambling, such as on tax revenues and employment. This subfactor also looks at the social costs of gambling such as unemployment and crime. *Socio-political environment* explores how social, political, and economic systems influence gambling in different states and nations. *Public policy* discusses policy focusing on preventing harm and promoting well-being. *Culture of social responsibility* examines the approaches used by governments and the industry to balance vested interests in revenue with social responsibility to prevent harm. *Responsible gambling* (RG) refers to tools and practices to prevent and reduce harmful gambling. RG is broadly informed by the Reno Model. However, this Model has been criticized for its focus

on individual responsibility. *Social and economic impact* considers the negative and positive impacts of gambling. *Low-risk limits* aims to provide guidelines on 'safe' gambling, similar to those for alcohol use.

Gambling exposure considers the extent that people come into contact with gambling. *Gambling setting* examines what may increase the risk of harmful gambling in land-based and Internet gambling (e.g., use of credit, alcohol availability). *Accessibility* looks at how access to land-based and Internet gambling may be linked to gambling behaviour and experiences of harm. *Adaptation* discusses the growth in gambling and whether rate of harmful gambling will reduce after an initial increase, as people become used to the exposure. *Marketing and messaging* examines media and advertising influences. *Convergence of gambling and gaming* explores the blurred boundaries between gambling and video gaming. This subfactor examines issues related to fantasy sports, gambling-like elements in video games (e.g., loot boxes), and gaming-like elements in gambling games.

Gambling types is concerned with how some forms of gambling are more closely associated with harmful gambling. *Structural characteristics* refer to game features that entice people to continue gambling, leading to harm e.g., short delay between betting and knowing the outcome, losses disguised as wins, and free spins in electronic gaming machines. *Motivational characteristics* looks at how motivations or reasons for participating in different types of gambling may be linked to harmful gambling.

Gambling resources provides information on resources and interventions to prevent and reduce harmful gambling. *Service access and use* examines the extent to which environmental factors (e.g., treatment availability) and psychological factors (e.g., shame and stigma) may affect the use of services. *Harm reduction, prevention, and protection* describes different programs and their effectiveness. It also looks at the tension between policies that limit gambling and marketing practices that promote gambling. *Risk assessment* outlines tools that are developed to assess the risk of various types of gambling. *Interventions* are treatments for people

with gambling problems including pharmacotherapy, cognitive behavioural therapy, and peer support. This subfactor now includes self-help as an intervention.

2) General factors

Cultural factors have an influence on gambling and experience of harm. *Ethnicity and traditions* discusses cultural perspectives and beliefs about gambling. This subfactor also considers the impacts of immigrant and refugee experiences. *Socio-cultural attitudes* explores changes in societal attitudes toward gambling, and how gambling attitudes vary by socio-demographic profiles, social classes, and political values. *Religion and other belief systems* explores the influences of religious beliefs and spiritual faith. *Indigenous peoples* provides a holistic understanding of Indigenous gambling, including the colonized and political conditions of Indigenous Peoples. *Gambling cultures* highlights how gamblers may form subcultures with their own languages and norms. It may be difficult for people to limit their gambling since the activity is a central part of their social network. *Gender* explores gendered patterns of gambling which may be linked to expectations about social roles.

Social factors include s*ociodemographics* that increase the likelihood of harmful gambling, such as young age, male gender, and low socio-demographic status. Homelessness and housing insecurity may also have long-lasting effects. *Family and peer gambling involvement* addresses the influences of parents and peers. It also examines the link between harmful gambling and intimate partner violence. *Education system* explores formal learning about the risks and consequences of harmful gambling in school settings. *Neighbourhood* examines neighbourhood characteristics that are linked to higher rates of gambling and harmful gambling. *Stigmatization* examines stereotypes, prejudices, and discrimination toward people with gambling problems. *Deviance* addresses how problem gambling is marked as a deviant behaviour. This subfactor also includes information on gambling and crime.

Psychological factors are individual differences that make some people more vulnerable to harmful

gambling. *Personality and temperament* examines individual thoughts, feelings, and actions. *Coping styles* looks at how certain coping styles are associated with harmful gambling. *Self-perceptions* examines how people's views and beliefs about themselves influence their gambling behaviour. *Social learning* is about the social environment's impact on gambling. *Life span environment* explores the effects of age and life events. It also examines how risk factors for harmful gambling change over the life course. *Subjective well-being* looks at how stress and well-being are associated with harmful gambling. *Comorbid disorders* explores the link between harmful gambling and other mental health conditions. *Judgment and decision making* examines how people make decisions and evaluate risks. *Adverse childhood experiences* shows that early experiences of trauma and abuse can lead to harmful gambling.

Biological factors refer to genetic and neurobiological differences. *Genetic inheritance* explores how genetic traits interact with the environment to influence gambling behaviour. *Neurobiology* explores differences in brain structure and functioning between people with and without gambling problems.

In addition, the Framework describes six longitudinal cohort studies from Canada, US, Australia, Sweden, and New Zealand, and their common findings.

Who is it intended for?

The Framework is intended for broad range of stakeholders including researchers, service providers, policy makers, regulators, and the general public.

About the researchers

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Citation

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About Gambling Research Exchange (GREO)

Gambling Research Exchange (GREO) has partnered with the Knowledge Mobilization Unit at York University to produce Research Snapshots. GREO is an independent knowledge translation and exchange organization that aims to eliminate harm from gambling. Our goal is to support evidence-informed decision making in safer gambling policies, standards, and practices. The work we do is intended for researchers, policy makers, gambling regulators and operators, and treatment and prevention service providers.

Learn more about GREO by visiting greo.ca or emailing info@greo.ca.