



## Defining and categorizing gambling-related harms

### What this research is about

Gambling can negatively impact individuals, families, and communities. Public health interventions to prevent or treat gambling problems often focus on reducing harm caused by gambling. However, there is no consistent definition of gambling-related harm for public health to use. There is also no conceptual framework that captures the diverse types of harm due to gambling. A conceptual framework is a network of linked ideas that help to explain a topic, such as problem gambling. The lack of consistent definition and conceptual framework causes difficulties for public health in addressing gambling-related harm. Thus, the current study proposed a definition and conceptual framework of gambling-related harm. The framework identifies and classifies the diverse types of harm that may be experienced by gamblers, affected others, and the broader community.

### What the researcher did

The researchers gathered data regarding gambling-related harms in four ways. First, they reviewed research literature to examine the types of harm experienced from gambling. Next, they held focus groups and interviews with 35 professionals whose work was related to problem gambling (e.g., treatment providers, clinicians, researchers, public policy-makers). The researchers then interviewed 25 individuals who had experienced harm from either their own or someone else's gambling. Finally, they examined 469 forum posts from gambling help or support forums to identify any other themes or harms that had not been captured from the literature review and interviews.

### What you need to know

There is a lack of consistency in how public health, treatment providers, policy-makers, and researchers interpret gambling-related harm. Based on diverse sources of evidence, the current study: (1) proposed a definition of gambling-related harm; (2) developed a conceptual framework to classify gambling-related harms; and (3) identified and organized the different types of harm into categories. The proposed conceptual framework has 3 themes. The first theme reflects that harms can be experienced by the person who gambles, affected others, and the broader community. Within this theme, the researchers organized gambling-related harms into 7 classifications. These include financial harms, relationship conflict and breakdown, emotional and psychological stress, physical health impacts, cultural harm, work and study impacts, and criminal activity. The second theme reflects that harms can occur at different time points as crisis, legacy, or general harms. The third theme reflects that harms can affect gamblers' life course or future generations.

### What the researcher found

The definition of gambling-related harm that the researchers generated from the data is: "Any initial or exacerbated adverse consequence due to an engagement with gambling that leads to a decrement to the health or wellbeing of an individual, family unit, community or population."

The proposed conceptual framework links several existing theories about gambling-related harm. It has 3 main themes. The first theme reflects that gambling-

related harms can be experienced by the gambler, affected others, or the broader community. The second theme reflects that harms can occur at different time points as crisis, legacy, or general harms. Crisis harms are significant harms that motivate people toward seeking treatment or changing their gambling behaviour. Legacy harms are those harms that continue to occur even if a person stops gambling. General harms might occur when someone begins gambling or throughout their gambling activities. The final theme is related to life course and intergenerational harms. These harms are so significant that they change the life course of a person, or influence different generations, such as the loss of a house can affect children.

As part of the first theme, the researchers organized gambling-related harms into 7 classifications, or dimensions: (1) financial harms including debts and loss of ability to meet household needs; (2) harms relating to relationships such as a breakdown of a relationship; (3) emotional or psychological harms including feelings of shame and stigma; (4) impacts on the person's health including greater alcohol consumption and poor nutrition; (5) cultural harm including loss of tie to participate in cultural practices; (6) reduced performance at school or work; and (7) criminal activity including theft from family members and welfare fraud.

#### How you can use this research

The current study identified and organized the diverse harms on finance, health and wellbeing that result from gambling. Researchers can use the 7 dimensions to organize future research on gambling-related harms. The proposed dimensions can also help develop measures of harm for public health to use. The findings provide treatment providers and policy-makers with greater information on gambling-related harms. They can use this knowledge when developing treatment and prevention strategies.

#### About the Researcher

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#### Keywords

Gambling, gambling harm, problem gambling, taxonomy, public health, summary measure, conceptual framework

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