

# research snapshot

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## The impact of long-term exposure to gambling on frontline casino employees in Macao

### What this research is about

Frontline casino employees regularly see people experience dramatic emotions due to gambling. People who lose money while gambling may show extreme emotions (e.g., crying) or become aggressive. Interactions between casino employees and gambling customers can be challenging. Employees may have to engage in emotional labour to deal with difficult customers. They often must regulate their own emotions during these encounters.

The concept of 'emotional dirty work' refers to how employees working in a socially stigmatized field may need to use certain tactics to protect their own emotional wellbeing. Long-term emotional labour may lead to burnout, frustration, and other negative effects. The purpose of this research was to examine the impact of long-term exposure to gambling on frontline casino employees.

### What the researchers did

The researchers conducted in-depth interviews with 46 participants who held frontline jobs in casino license-holding companies in Macao, China.

The researchers used snowball sampling to identify participants. They first interviewed five students who studied part-time at the university where the researchers worked. The researchers then asked the students to recommend other potential participants.

Most participants were between 31 and 40 years old (72%). Half were male and half were female. Almost half of the participants had a high school diploma or equivalent, and over one third held a college or university degree. Most (75%) of the participants had worked as a frontline casino employee for at least 10

### What you need to know

Frontline casino employees may be affected by extreme emotions or aggression from people who gamble and who lose money. This research examined the impact of long-term exposure to gambling on frontline casino employees. The researchers conducted in-depth interviews with 46 participants who held frontline jobs in casino license-holding companies in Macao, China.

The researchers identified three themes, including (1) employees' emotional responses to people who gamble, including indifference, sympathy, perplexity, and worry; (2) employees' observations about organizational malpractice and negative social impacts of gambling (e.g., increased crime and financial harm to families); and (3) the impacts on employees' personal lives, which range from negative to positive. For example, some participants did not experience much negative impact on their lives due to their job, while others discussed how they were tempted to gamble. A few participants viewed their experiences at work as warnings to help remind themselves or their families to not gamble.

years, including as dealers, supervisors, and pit managers.

### What the researchers found

The researchers identified three key themes from the interview responses:

**Emotional responses:** Participants discussed their emotional responses to people who gamble. A total of 11 participants felt indifference to people who gamble

(e.g., “I don’t care how much they lose because they are not my relatives or acquaintances”). Six participants expressed sympathy for people who gamble. Six participants discussed feeling perplexed and had contradictory feelings about seeing casino customers lose their bets. For example, one participant relied on the job to earn a living but “thought my job was very sinful when observing some crazy gamblers who continuously bet and lost.” Five participants were worried about the risk of mistreatment by casino customers.

**‘Dirty’ work:** Participants shared observations about organizational malpractice. Some participants had negative perceptions about the companies that they worked for and about their own jobs. For example, some participants felt that gambling companies intentionally mislead customers.

Participants also discussed several social issues related to the gambling industry. These issues included an increase in crime and problem gambling. For example, participants discussed how problem gambling can financially harm families.

**Impact on private life:** Participants shared a range of impacts related to exposure to gambling on their private lives. Some participants said that they did not experience much negative impact on their lives due to their job. But others discussed how they were tempted to gamble. A few participants viewed their job as having a positive impact on their lives. For example, participants described how they used their experiences as warnings for themselves and family members. Some participants talked about self-monitoring their behaviours and telling family members to never gamble.

Finally, the impact of long-term exposure to gambling on personal lives may be influenced by age. For example, some participants tried gambling when they were younger but do not gamble any longer. Some participants mentioned seeing young co-workers becoming addicted to gambling.

Overall, the researchers discussed the emotional costs for frontline employees related to their work in casinos. They suggested several ways for gambling

operators to enhance the wellbeing of employees. For example, gambling operators could develop policies to support employees’ wellbeing and provide training to help employees cope with emotional stress.

### How you can use this research

Gambling operators can use this research to provide support and training in emotional management for employees.

### About the researchers

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### Citation

Manian, W., Yan, L., & Zeng, Z. (2023). The lived experience of frontline casino workers. *International Gambling Studies*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14459795.2023.2273520>

### Study funding

This study received no direct funding.

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