

research snapshot

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Strengthening support services for women who experience intimate partner violence and gambling harm

What this research is about

Intimate partner violence (IPV) refers to abuse by a current or former spouse or romantic partner. IPV causes physical, emotional, psychological, and sexual harm. Economic abuse is also being recognised as a form of IPV. Economic abuse involves coercing and taking control over money and other types of assets. While problem gambling does not directly cause IPV, its negative consequences can worsen the violence.

People with problem gambling may carry out acts of IPV or be a victim of IPV. Past studies have noted that gender plays a role in gambling-related IPV, with a greater number of women who are victims. Women facing both IPV and gambling harm often have complex support needs. Yet, little is known about their experiences of using health and social support services. This study explored the service experiences of women whose life was impacted by IPV and gambling. It used a strengths-based approach to identify how services could be strengthened to better meet the needs of these women.

What the researchers did

This study involved interviews with 48 women who experienced IPV linked to a male partner's gambling and 24 women who experienced IPV linked to their own gambling. All women lived in Australia and had received professional help for one or both of these issues. The women were between 20 and 69 years old. Interviews took place between July 2018 and June 2019. A female researcher interviewed the women over the telephone. During the interview, the women told their story of how gambling and IPV had affected their life, and their experience of help-seeking. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed.

What you need to know

Women who experience intimate partner violence (IPV) and gambling harm often have complex support needs. Yet, little is known about their experiences of using health and social support services. In this study, interviews took place with 48 women who experienced IPV linked to a male partner's gambling and 24 women who experienced IPV linked to their own gambling. The aim of this study was to identify how services could be strengthened to better meet the needs of these women. Three themes were identified. The first theme was the need for integrated and holistic responses from services. The second theme was the need for person-centred, trauma-informed support. The third theme was the value of practical support and strategies from services.

The researchers coded and identified major themes from the interviews. They focused the analysis on how services could be strengthened to better address the needs of women facing gambling-related IPV.

What the researchers found

The women all suffered from verbal, emotional, and psychological violence from their male partner. Some women also reported physical and sexual violence. Nearly all women whose partner had a gambling problem experienced economic abuse. Most women described their partner as being abusive, controlling, and holding negative attitudes towards women even before the gambling problem occurred. They described worsening IPV over time and the fear of further violence. The researchers identified three major themes regarding how to strengthen services.

Theme 1: Commitment to integrated and collaborative responses

At an individual level, the women valued practitioners who understood and were able to address both gambling harm and IPV. Many women did not recognise economic abuse as a form of IPV, or did not recognise the link between gambling and IPV. Instead, the practitioners helped them gain insight into their situation and receive the appropriate support.

At an organisational level, the women highlighted the importance of integrated services or services with a strong network with other services. Integrated services could be those that offered IPV, gambling, and mental health support in one agency. An integrated and holistic response meant that the women would not have to re-live their story of abuse to every agency. Some women spoke highly of a screening tool asking about the harm arising from gambling and IPV in a non-threatening way. Finding free services was also important as the economic abuse had left many women with no spare funds.

Theme 2: Therapeutic support

The women valued being able to talk to the service providers without feeling being judged. They emphasised person-centred, trauma-informed support that was tailored to their needs. Some women advocated moving beyond a crisis response to long-term recovery. Group support was also valuable. Many women struggled with shame and stigma. They valued being able to share their stories with others in a group counselling or peer support group.

Theme 3: Instrumental support

The women mentioned practical support from the Domestic and Family Violence (DFV) sector. They noted the importance of safe shelters and emergency funds when they left the relationship. Other material support, such as clothing, and contact information of relevant agencies were also important. Many women found it useful to work through a safety plan with the service providers. The women also found practical strategies offered by gambling help and financial counselling services useful. With the support, some women opened new bank accounts and increased the security on their accounts. The women with a

gambling problem learned to identify the triggers for their gambling and how to minimize the harm.

How you can use this research

This study can inform public health interventions and treatments. It suggests an integrated, multi-agency approach to address gambling-related IPV. Future research could explore gambling-related IPV through a cultural lens. This would help support the design of culturally and linguistically appropriate services.

About the researchers

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Citation

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