

knowledge snapshot



Land-based gambling venue employees' responses to patrons with problem gambling behaviours

What this article is about

Staff at land-based gambling venues can help communicate information about responsible gambling. They can also help to identify patrons who may be experiencing problem gambling. Importantly, venue staff can take an active role in intervening before patrons experience more harm. This review summarizes research on the strategies, practices, and policies concerning, and behaviours of, venue staff's responses towards patrons with problem gambling behaviours.

What was done?

The authors used a systematic approach. They searched four electronic databases: Scopus, ProQuest, PsychInfo, and Web of Science. Articles were included if they were written in English, published in 1990 or later, and peer-reviewed. Articles had to focus on land-based venues that operate electronic gaming machines (EGMs). They had to include information about gambling venue employees' responses to patrons with problem gambling or their involvement in the promotion of harm minimization.

A total of 1,525 articles were found. Duplicates were removed. The authors then used the inclusion criteria to screen the remaining articles. A total of 82 articles were left for full-text screening. The authors also searched the reference lists of the included articles. In total, 49 articles were included in the review.

What you need to know

The authors identified five themes:

Corporate social responsibility programs: Gambling venues' codes of conduct often instruct employees to look out for potential problem gambling behaviours.

Why is this article important?

Staff at land-based gambling venues can help identify patrons experiencing problem gambling. They can also communicate information about responsible gambling. This review summarizes research on the strategies, practices, and policies concerning, and behaviours of, gambling venue staff's responses towards problem gambling behaviours. A total of 49 articles were included in the review. The authors identified five key themes: (1) corporate social responsibility programs; (2) identification of patrons with problem gambling; (3) venue staff's responses; (4) patrons' perspectives about venue responsibilities and interactions; and (5) needs of gambling venue staff. Overall, most activity that venue staff undertake in response to problem gambling is limited to observing. There is little action beyond discussing risky behaviours with other venue staff. It is important for venue staff to be given clear guidelines on how to identify people with problem gambling and intervene appropriately.

But these codes often lack clear guidelines about what staff should do if they identify problem gambling behaviours. The most common guideline is that employees should document observed risky behaviours and report these behaviours to a senior staff member. But such information is not typically recorded in any formal way nor acted upon.

Identification of people with potential gambling problems: There is a range of reliable and observable behavioural indicators that can help identify people with gambling problems. Some studies reported that

employees feel they know what these indicators are. But they face challenges in using these indicators. One study found that employees would need to spend a lot of time observing people to identify problem behaviours. This is impractical because employees have other competing duties.

Venue staff responses: Patrons often do not approach venue staff for help related to their gambling problems. Employees generally feel comfortable responding to those who do. But employees are sometimes apprehensive and feel discomfort depending on how embarrassed the patrons appear. In contrast, employees are not as confident in approaching patrons themselves. They are concerned about breaching patrons' privacy, misidentifying a patron as having gambling problems, or causing distress to patrons. Employees also do not feel confident in their knowledge and do not know the procedures on how to initiate contact with a person who may be at risk.

Beliefs about venue responsibilities and interactions: There are mixed findings about how people view employees' role in minimizing harm from problem gambling. Studies found that some patrons do not think that venues are responsible for protecting people from gambling harm. Compared to people without problem gambling, people with problem gambling are more likely to think that other stakeholders (including casino employees) are responsible for addressing gambling-related harm. Patrons often feel it is hypocritical if venue staff are to approach them about harm reduction strategies because of potential conflicts in role.

Needs of gambling venue staff: Overall, there is a need for staff to be better supported in respond to signs of problem gambling. Studies showed that employees want clearer procedures about what the indicators of problem gambling are. They also want guidance about how to approach patrons of concern. Staff sometimes feel stressed because they perceive that their job involves dual, conflicting roles. On one hand, they are paid to facilitate the use of gambling machines. On the other hand, they are asked to minimize gambling-related harm to patrons. Also, employees who spend

more time around people with signs of problem gambling have lower job satisfaction.

Who is it intended for?

This review suggests that gambling operators and policymakers should re-think the role of frontline gambling venue staff in addressing problem gambling.

About the researchers

Ben J. Riley, Sharon Lawn, and Malcolm Battersby are affiliated with the College of Medicine and Public Health at Flinders University in Adelaide, SA, Australia. **Beth R. Crisp** is affiliated with the School of Health & Social Development in the Faculty of Health at Deakin University in Geelong, VIC, Australia. For more information about this study, please contact Ben J. Riley at ben.riley@sa.gov.au.

Citation

Riley, B. J., Lawn, S., Crisp, B. R., & Battersby, M. (2023). Much ado about nothing? The role of land-based gambling venue employees in facilitating problem gambling harm reduction and help-seeking. *Journal of Gambling Studies*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10899-023-10226-x>

Study funding

No funding was received to conduct this study. Open Access funding was enabled and organized by CAUL and its Member Institutions.

About Greo

Greo has partnered with the Knowledge Mobilization Unit at York University to produce Research Snapshots. Greo is an independent knowledge translation and exchange organization with almost two decades of international experience in generating, synthesizing, and mobilizing research into action across the health and wellbeing sectors. Greo helps organizations improve their strategies, policies, and practices by harnessing the power of evidence and stakeholder insight.

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

