



Gambling Types

WHY IS THIS FACTOR IMPORTANT?

There are different types of gambling available either in gambling venues or on the Internet. Gambling types can be grouped into two broad categories:

1. *Games of chance* are non-strategic games in which the outcomes are determined by chance only. Examples include lotteries, instant lotteries, bingo, and electronic gaming machines (EGMs) such as video lottery terminals or slot machines.
2. *Games of skill* are strategic games in which the outcomes are determined by both skill and chance. Examples include sports betting, horse race betting, and poker.

Gambling types differ in their game features, also known as their structural characteristics.

Furthermore, people have different motivations, or reasons, for gambling. People may gamble at a harmful level because of the structural characteristics of certain games and their motivations for playing. This factor summarizes what is known in research about structural characteristics and motivations to participate in different types of gambling. It also covers how specific types of gambling may relate to harmful gambling.

WHAT TOPICS ARE INCLUDED IN THIS FACTOR?

Structural Characteristics

Gambling types differ on a number of structural characteristics. One structural characteristic is the time between making a gamble and knowing the outcome. In lotteries, there is usually a long delay, often several days, between buying a

ticket and knowing the winning outcome. In other games, such as instant lotteries and EGMs, the delay is very short and may only be a few seconds; people can immediately begin gambling again in these types of games. Research shows that people with gambling problems prefer faster games and rate those games as more exciting.

EGMs are considered one of the most harmful types of gambling. Aside from the fast rate of play, EGMs have a few other structural characteristics that may lead to harmful gambling. One appealing characteristic of EGMs is “bonus features”, often being offered as free spins. Additionally, EGMs celebrate wins with bright lights and sounds so that people who gamble begin to associate the lights and sounds with winning. Games with bonus features and celebratory feedback are attractive to people with gambling problems.

Modern EGMs allow people to bet on multiple lines at the same time. Multi-line games have losses disguised as wins (LDWs), which occur when the winning amount is less than the wager. Even though the amount “won” is less than what was bet, the “win” is accompanied by the same celebratory lights and sounds. In this way, people often mistake LDWs as actual wins and react to them in the same way as they would a win. With LDWs, people often overestimate the number of wins that have occurred during a gambling session.

“Near-misses” are another game feature that can be harmful. A near-miss occurs when the outcome is very close to a win but falls short (e.g., getting two out of the three jackpot symbols needed to win a prize on a scratch card). In EGMs, both LDWs and near-misses have been reported to motivate people to keep playing despite their losses. People with gambling problems are particularly vulnerable to the effects of LDWs and near-misses.

Structural characteristics of certain gambling types can increase the illusion of control. That is, people mistakenly believe that they can control the outcome of the game. Illusion of control can cause people to continue gambling despite their losses. Early wins during a gambling session can also cause an illusion of control. Research indicates that people with gambling problems have greater illusion of control than people without gambling problems.

Motivational Characteristics

People have different motivations to gamble, and different types of games can appeal to different motivations.

A motivation common to all gambling types is the desire to win money. But, people with gambling problems often place more importance on winning money than people without gambling problems. In popular culture, winning is associated with success, happiness, and a better life. Some games, such as lotteries, offer the fantasy of winning big with a small wager. Thus, while lotteries are considered quite harmless for the most part, people experiencing financial hardship may spend more than they can afford on lotteries, with the unrealistic hope of winning big.

The social context of gambling can be important. People may gamble to socialize and spend time with friends and family members. Evidence on how the social motivation is related to harmful gambling is mixed. On the one hand, people may want to socialize with others and, therefore, spend more time and money on gambling than they want to; on the other hand, gambling with other people may act as a form of social control. In other words, people may stop themselves from gambling to excess to avoid the disapproval of others.

Gambling for excitement and gambling to cope with or escape from stress and life troubles are two other common motives. Gambling for excitement, also known as the enhancement motive, has been associated with harmful gambling. Some games, including high stakes casino games, are set up to satisfy the desire for excitement. Gambling to cope with or escape

from stress and life troubles is very common among people with gambling problems. Some games, including EGMs, may bring about a state of dissociation. In that state, gamblers become so immersed in the game that they lose track of time and their surroundings. As a consequence, they spend more time and money gambling than they realize.

Some people gamble to demonstrate their skill and compete with others. These two motives are common among players of certain games, like poker and sports betting. Some people who gamble may develop irrational beliefs about their skill in gambling. For example, they may believe that they will become more skillful if they continue to gamble. They may also believe that wins occur because of their skill, whereas losses occur due to bad luck. If people overestimate how much influence their skill has on the outcome of the game, it may lead them to gamble excessively.

In general, people who participate in many types of gambling tend to gamble more heavily. Consequently, they are at a greater risk of developing gambling problems.

This is a summary of the Gambling Types Factor, one of eight interrelated factors that comprise the Conceptual Framework of Harmful Gambling. To learn more about this factor, please refer to the [full report](#) or visit the [gambling types factor webpage](#) on the GREO website.