



Social Factors

WHAT IS THIS FACTOR ABOUT?

Social factors refer to how people communicate with family, friends, co-workers, and neighbours. Many factors influence how these communications take place, including a person's environment or cultural beliefs. For example, many gambling activities take place in the presence of others, yet most people in these settings communicate with one another minimally or on a formal, gambling-related basis.

WHY IS THIS FACTOR IMPORTANT?

Social factors are important because they can have an impact on where commercial gambling is made available, and on a person's attitude towards gambling. Social factors can protect and increase a person's risk of developing gambling problems. For example, it may be protective to be in a close relationship with someone who rarely gambles, whereas a close relationship with someone who regularly gambles can lead to more gambling. There is currently a limited number of studies looking at the relationship between social factors and gambling related harm.

WHAT TOPICS ARE INCLUDED IN THIS FACTOR?

Social Demographics

A number of studies found that gambling problems are more common in men, and people who are single, under the age of 30 years, low-income, low education, or reside in a large city. Other research found that certain jobs are linked to higher rates of problem gambling. These jobs are usually blue-collar jobs (e.g. a taxi driver or someone who works in sales), where there may

be flexible hours, cash on hand, or easy access to gambling venues.

In Canada, Australia, and England, researchers are beginning to examine the relationship between gambling problems and homelessness. This research may bring some awareness to the impact that housing insecurity has on gambling participation and long-term outcomes. Areas of research where more studies are needed include investigating the relationship between gambling and wealth, job stress, and unemployment.

Family and Peer Gambling Involvement

Family members influence a person's gambling behaviours and these loved ones can play a role in contributing to, and preventing gambling problems. Studies found higher rates of gambling participation and harm in adolescents who lived with a parent who gambled. Parenting style can also influence an adolescent's gambling participation. For example, studies suggest that gambling problems are less likely to occur if a parent is more authoritative and closely monitors their child's behaviour.

Peers can also influence a person's gambling behaviour. For example, having peers that are antisocial may increase an adolescents' risk of developing gambling problems. Having 'gambling friends' or friends that only share a gambling interest, can also increase a person's gambling participation. If the gambling friends take more risks when gambling, a person may respond competitively and bet outside of their limits.

Many people with gambling problems fail to seek formal treatment, so their family and friends can be a potential support. People do cope with gambling problems in different ways however, so loved ones may help or hurt the chances of obtaining proper treatment and support.

Studies are beginning to look at how intimate partner relationships influence gambling outcomes. Previous studies found problem gambling was related to an increase in dating and marital violence, and child abuse. The observed violence is thought to be influenced by factors such as young age, no full-time employment, anger and substance use issues.

Education System

Given that youth are engaging in gambling-related activities, the education system can be used to teach students about the risks and benefits of gambling. There are only a small number of studies that examined students' knowledge and attitudes towards gambling, and the influence of educational strategies. In addition, existing evaluation studies are not representative as they only focus on youth between 12 and 18 years, and they do not assess long-term outcomes of gambling participation. There are also concerns that educators will not adopt gambling prevention strategies, as not all educators view gambling as a problem activity.

Neighbourhood

Access to gambling opportunities varies across neighbourhoods and it not randomly distributed. Evidence suggests that gambling venues are often located in neighbourhoods with lower social capital. The people who live in these neighbourhoods are more likely to participate in gambling and develop gambling problems.

Social capital broadly refers to networks of people who have shared values, trust and cooperation. Neighbourhoods with high social capital usually have complex social networks where residents have high trust and confidence in one another. Neighbourhoods with low social capital however, have residents who are of lower socio-economic status and who have little trust in one another or other institutions.

Stigmatization

Stigmatization occurs when someone is treated poorly because of a certain characteristic (e.g. being shamed for gambling), and is sometimes used to exclude or control people. There is some

evidence to suggest that certain cultures stigmatize more than others, and that women experience stigmatization more than men. There is limited research however, about the impact stigmatization has on gambling participation and related outcomes.

The general public often views people with gambling problems as being compulsive, risk taking, greedy, irrational, or antisocial. They also typically view gambling problems as an addiction and not as a feature of a person's character. If a person does have gambling problems and they feel stigma, they may not disclose their problem or seek treatment.

Deviance

Deviance is defined as a state or behaviour that goes against a society's social norms. Some people view deviant behavior as a medical condition or form of mental illness. This view has been adopted by many people in relation to gambling, dating back to the 1970's.

Although research on gambling as a deviant behaviour is rare, some researchers believe that deviant behaviour may be caused by an underlying behavioural syndrome. One study found high rates of deviant behaviour in groups of friends that gambled informally. Another study found high rates of problem gambling in prison populations. People who commit crimes may do so to obtain money to support their regular gambling. For example, a study in Denmark found problem gambling to be associated with economic crimes and drug charges.

This is a summary of the Social 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 [social factor webpage](#) on the GREO website.

