

# STRESS AND STRESSORS IN GAMBLING AND HOSPITALITY WORKPLACES FOR EMPLOYEES

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## Aims

- To identify risk and protective factors for problem gambling by gambling & hospitality employees,
- To explain the emergence of workplace stress & stressors for these employee groups,
- To discuss protective implications/ measures that might assist employees reduce risks of developing gambling-related problems.



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## Background



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# Gambling in Australia

All the usual commercial forms are available: lottery-style games, poker (slot) machines, horse and dog racing, sports betting, some online gambling, casino table games, Keno, Bingo, scratch tickets, card games, betting exchanges.

Some less well-known gambling forms: Aboriginal card games, cane toad, pig, goat & camel races, private games.

In licensed venues: casinos, hotels, registered clubs, TABs (pari-mutual betting venues), online for sports, race wagering & lotteries, but also in homes and private settings.




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## Some more unusual forms...

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## General findings from prior research

- Overall, higher rates of problem gambling for gaming venue employees than amongst the general population.
- But, Shaffer & Hall found some evidence of a reduction in gambling problems over time - adaptation to work env't?
- Nevertheless, these studies suggest gaming venue employees are an at-risk group for gambling problems.
- But did not address *how* or *why* working in a venue might influence employee gambling.
- Nor how responsible gambling can be encouraged amongst staff.
- References: Collachi & Taber (1987), Duquette (2000), Guttenberg (2010), Lee et al. (2008), Shaffer & Hall (2002), Shaffer, Vander Bilt & Hall (1999), Wong & Lam (2013), Wu & Wong (2007).




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# Question

Why do you think gaming venue staff might have higher rates of gambling problems?

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# Reasons

Consider 3 possible reasons for why staff tend to have higher rates of problem gambling than the general population:

1. Staff increase their gambling/develop gambling problems once they start work in the industry
2. The industry attracts gamblers/problem gamblers
3. Problem gamblers stay in the industry longer than non-problem gamblers

(Guttentag, 2010)

Which of these reasons makes most sense to you?

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# Projects

## Study 1

Qualitative study of gambling amongst Queensland venue staff. Multiple interviews on-site with 73 gaming managers, 86 gaming employees, 32 gambling counsellors, 6 problem gamblers who developed gambling problems while working in venues

## Study 2

Quantitative study of gambling amongst Queensland venue staff. On-site, mail & online survey. Respondents - 511 staff from casinos, hotels and clubs in QLD. Vast majority cannot gamble in workplace at any time on gaming machines (97%) or TAB (86%) or keno (illegal)

## Study 3

Quantitative study of gambling amongst Victorian venue staff (with small qualitative component, 40 people ) Mail survey of staff working in all Victorian hotels and clubs with 533 responses. Measured gambling behaviour, PGSI and some workplace characteristics.

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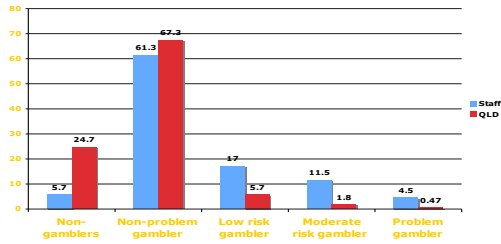
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### Surveys: Gambling problems amongst Qld staff



Lower proportions of staff were non-gamblers and non-problem gamblers.  
 Proportion of problem gamblers = 10 x higher, moderate risk gamblers = 6 x higher,  
 low risk gamblers = 3 x higher than for the QLD population




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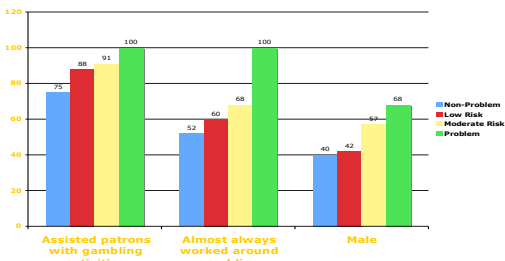
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### At risk staff?



Exposure and active work involvement with gambling associated with gambling problems, particularly amongst males.




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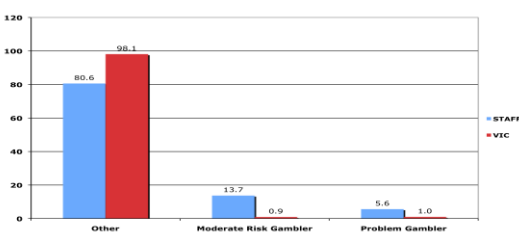
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### Gambling problems amongst Vic venue staff



- Staff problem gambler rate = 5.8 x higher, moderate risk rate = 15 x higher than Victorian population
- Staff who assisted patrons with gambling activities and who had less RG training were more likely to be problem or moderate risk gamblers




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## Themes emerging from interviews

### Risk & Protective factors associated with:

- 1: close interaction with gamblers
- 2: frequent exposure to gambling
- 3: influence of fellow employees
- 4: influence of management
- 5: influence of workplace stress
- 6: influence of shift work
- 7: frequent exposure to gambling marketing & promotions
- 8: influence of other responsible gambling training measures
- 9: general risk factors




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## Workplace risk & protective factors for gaming venue staff

- Developed scale to measure potential risk factors
- 41 questions based on themes that emerged from Study 1
- Factor analysis to find underlying constructs
- General linear modelling to test for any links between these constructs and problem gambling
- Identified 5 sets of risk factors statistically related to the *development* of gambling problems amongst gaming venue staff




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## Risk factors for staff in developing gambling problems

1. **Workplace motivators to gamble**
  - gambling to: cope with job dissatisfaction, boredom and stress, make friends and socialise, win money, improve job performance, relax after work.
  - *'it gets very busy... the stressors of the job can influence staff to gamble. Gambling can be relaxing and take your mind off things'.*
2. **Influence of work colleagues**
  - working with managers and staff who: are regular gamblers, approve of gambling, encourage staff to gamble, talk about positive aspects of gambling, share gambling tips with them.
  - *'always someone asking you to contribute to whatever they are running - football, poker nights, AFL, tips on horses'*
  - *'some managers are avid gamblers. They say let's go down and put some money through'.*
3. **Workplace triggers to gamble**
  - seeing: large jackpots on offer, patrons winning, large amounts of cash and just being around gambling at work.
  - *'it changes a dealer's attitude toward their wages. Big sums don't seem so big'.*




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## Risk factors for staff in developing gambling problems (cont'd)

- **4. Limited social opportunities**
  - due to shift work, which can then be accompanied by loneliness, a need to find solitary leisure activities, and the workplace becoming a primary social outlet.
  - *'staff turn to gambling...shift work can be socially isolating'.*
  - *'staff are attracted back to the hotel... where they feel comfortable'.*
- **5. Familiarity and interest in gambling**
  - increased familiarity, comfort, knowledge, excitement and interest relating to gambling and its potential normalisation through frequent exposure.
  - *'it's a culture... it becomes part of people's lives'.*
  - *'when a \$1.8m jackpot went off I felt very excited and hyped up. I left work...and all I wanted to do was play the poker machines'.*




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## Risk factors for staff in addressing gambling problems

- **Discouragement to address a gambling problem**
  - fear of job loss if admit to a gambling problem, fear of being blamed for cash shortfalls, feeling too embarrassed to admit a problem because staff 'should know better', concern work colleagues would not take problem seriously.
  - *'losing your job is a circumstance... you wouldn't tell them (management) that you have a problem'.*
  - *'we have opportunity and exposure. The industry is usually forgotten in... problem gambling'.*
  - *'we get a lot of staff from other clubs and they're pretty big gamblers. So we may not see where some of our staff go and what they do'.*




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## Protective factors for staff against developing gambling problems

- **1. Knowledge of responsible gambling**
  - heightened knowledge about: problem gambling and its effects, the poor odds in gambling, responsible gambling as promoted at work.
  - *'you see people go home with nothing, and that has turned me completely off it'.*
  - *'deters staff from gambling through involvement with Self Exclusion'.*
- **2. Influence of work colleagues**
  - friends at work who wanted to avoid gambling venues when going out, advice from work colleagues to not gamble.
  - *'another gaming staff member would... say you know you're not going to win on them'.*
  - *'you want to do something different on your days off'.*




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## Protective factors for staff for addressing gambling problems

### • Encouragement to Address a Gambling Problem

- being encouraged to recognise a gambling problem and to seek help by the responsible gambling measures at work, fellow staff and managers
- *'If you could play them, you would, a lot of people come to work at the casino so that they can't gamble. They have had a previous gambling problem'.*




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## Questions

Do these risk and protective factors align with your experience as a gambling provider, trainer, counsellor or researcher?




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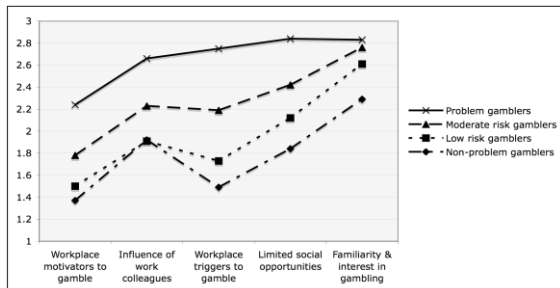
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Does working in a venue increase risk of gambling problems? Evidence suggests yes.




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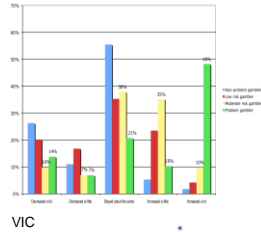
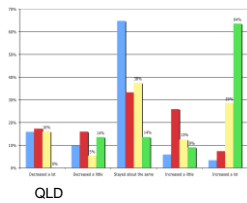
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## Does the industry attract problem gamblers?

- 14-21% of current problem gamblers and 38% of current moderate risk gamblers reported same level of gambling when they commenced work.
- 58-73% of current problem gamblers and 43-45% of moderate risk gamblers reported increasing their gambling since commencing work.




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## Questions

What measures might better protect staff from developing gambling problems?




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## Possible venue strategies to encourage responsible staff gambling

Identified in Study 1 interviews, rated by staff in Study 2:

- assisting me to self-exclude from gaming venues
- not being able to gamble at all in my workplace
- ensuring that my training emphasises the effects of problem gambling
- training in responsible gambling
- providing me with information about counselling
- ensuring that my training emphasises the odds in gambling
- ensuring that my training also focuses on staff gambling
- assuring me that I would not lose my job due to a gambling problem
- providing me with more information to assess if I have a gambling problem




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### Possible venue strategies to encourage responsible staff gambling (cont'd)

- involving local gambling counselling services in my training
- regular responsible gambling refresher courses
- not extending advances on my pay
- putting more emphasis in the workplace on responsible gambling
- promoting alternative social activities for staff
- training in stress and conflict management
- having tight security to minimise the temptation to steal cash
- providing me with a non gambling-related job in my workplace if I have a gambling problem
- not paying me my wages in cash




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### Thus:

Gaming venue staff are a group of people with up to 10 times the risk of developing gambling problems  
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 who are easily accessed  
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 with interventions that are readily implemented  
 +  
 to protect both them and their employers  
 =  
 opportunity for action




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### Question

- What pro-active measures would you consider suitable for gaming venue staff in your community ?




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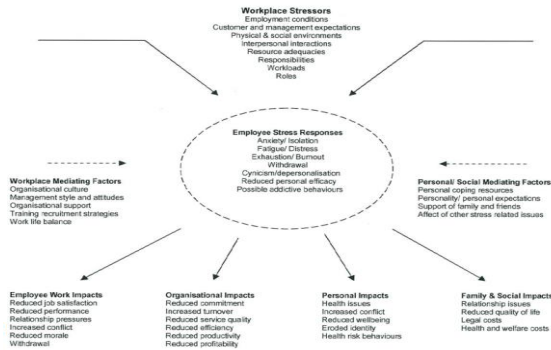
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## Key Features of the Work Stress Process

(Tijce, Hing, Cairncross & Breen (2013, p. 133))



## Employee stressors in gambling workplaces – employment conditions

• “If I was paid better and thought that the company was going to look after me in the future, give me a career path. ... [There is a] feeling of hopelessness, for example with property prices, I would never be able to buy my own home”.

- Low pay and rewards
- Low promotion or career prospects
- Lack of job security
- Unpredictable rostering
- Lack of autonomy
- Lack of predictable days off
- Lack of regular holidays
- Management inconsistencies & conflict
- High turnover
- Lack of alternative employment opportunities



## Employee stressors in gambling workplaces – shift work

“You work to 2.30 am, won’t go to sleep until 4 am and by the time you get up you have lost half your Sunday or it’s gone. I can’t participate in normal activities – family barbeques, etc. Add to that the lack of regular holidays. ... Shift work and uncertainty can have horrible effects on relationships”.

- Lack of social life, social isolation
- Need to fill in time between shifts
- Work schedules conflicting with family responsibilities
- Work schedules conflicting with social opportunities
- Work schedules conflicting with leisure opportunities
- Work schedules conflicting with need for sleep & rest
- Interruption to biorhythms
- Undermines work life balance



### Employee stressors in gambling workplaces – work role

• "Everyone is under stress when you work in a [gambling] venue, that's just the nature of the thing. There are lots of rules ... lots of pressure. Staff do not have a lot of control over their work, and a lack of control generates stress".

- Long hours and demanding work
- Heavy unpredictable workloads
- Fast pace of work environment
- Boring, monotonous, menial work
- Lack of meaning to the work
- Lack of control over work
- Inadequate training and support
- Personal safety issues




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### Employee stressors in gambling workplaces – responsibility

"Staff are expected to encourage patrons to keep playing, by going and getting drinks... to keep patrons at a machine whenever they can, and it is stressful when they can see that a patron is stressed. ... That's one of the stress factors for me. I would hate to meet someone who has a problem and I haven't picked it up on it, or I worry that I've encouraged them to keep going ..."

- Legal obligations for responsible service of alcohol
- Legal obligations for responsible service of gambling
- Heightened responsibility for patron welfare




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### Employee stressors in gambling workplaces – customer interaction

"It can ruin lives and make people desperate ... the traumas they are putting their families through ... I have seen people lose their houses at the casino, lose their cars, and gambling has cost some of the patrons their marriage. ... A customer won \$10,000, cashed his chips in and was back straight away putting the money back on the table. This can make me feel frustrated".

- Close interaction, familiarity with patrons
- Limited capacity to help patrons of concern
- Being a silent witness to harmful behaviour
- Role conflict
- Role ambiguity




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### Employee stressors in gambling workplaces – emotional labour

“There is a lot of stress when people are being asked to be polite, to be nice to clients, and its not a reciprocal thing ... From personal experience it does get to you. Trying to be polite and have a big smile on your face 24/7 wears thin after a while”.

- Constantly having to be pleasant
- Conflicting emotions of staff & patrons
- Dealing with intoxicated patrons
- Dealing with emotional patrons
- Dealing with aggressive, argumentative, abusive behaviour
- Dealing with patron distress and life trauma




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### Employee stressors in gambling workplaces – uncertainty & lack of control

“If they are losing money, people get rude ... Most gamblers are very impatient people. They can be very abrupt ... get aggressive with the machines. I’m at the forefront, [when people] want to criticise, chastise, condemn, complain, scrutinise, it all comes to me”.

- Volatile customers
- Need for vigilance
- Emotionally charged environment
- Unpredictable patron behaviour




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### Employee stressors in gambling workplaces – ethical concerns

“The company doesn’t care about responsible gambling, they just want the money. They don’t care if the patron is down to their last dollar ... You see the same gamblers every day and nobody does anything about it ... When it comes to practice on the floor, most of the rules go out the window. Most of the staff get annoyed by this”.

- Serving potentially harmful products
- Promoting gambling to patrons with gambling problems
- Limited ability to help patrons with gambling problems
- Profiting from patrons’ losses/ problems
- Frustration or depression over money gambled/wasted
- Conflict amongst management/staff/patron attitudes




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## Employee stressors in gambling workplaces – super charged environment

- “The noise of the machines is very annoying ... a talking roulette wheel you can hear ... auditory stimuli jingling bells that go off continually ... the lights and whistles. I’ve been around it for a while, and I’m sick of it”.
- Artificial, bright, flashing lighting
- Loud, repetitive and irritating noises
- Hyped, stimulating environment
- Lack of natural light and fresh air




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## Conclusions

### Specific workplace stressors for gaming employees:

- coping with heightened emotions.
- conflicting management/customer goals.
- ethical & social concerns about gambling & responsible gambling.
- conflicting social attitudes to gambling.
- ambiguity for front line staff.
- unique physical environment, often super-charged setting.
- Does responsible gambling training address any of these stresses and risks?




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## Workplace implications

- Regular monitoring of employee & workplace stress levels to improve job satisfaction & reduce staff turnover.
- Ensuring appropriate rewards.
- Introducing organisational training & support to bolster coping capacity & resilience.
- Providing employee assistance programs to extend skills & career paths.
- Addressing workplace risk by analyses of health & safety issues.
- Taking a strategic HR approach to improve motivation, service quality & organisational productivity.
- Productivity benefits should flow to employer organisations, employees, families & communities.




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### What risks & stressors are apparent here?

A female in her late 20s had worked in 5 venues as bar & gaming attendant, trainer, maitre d'. All venues allowed staff to gamble outside working hours. She had been playing slot/gaming machines for 4 years and in counselling for 6 months.

Before working in venues, she "was never a gambler" but started gambling "because you see people win...that was what encouraged me".

She gambled more when promoted, to deal with the added stress of "dealing with staff and management, copping it from both sides".

She often gambled with other staff, where "if you finish work with someone...you'd grab a beer and put \$10 in the pokies...a wind down, before you went home". Or she "would go to another venue...just be by myself...my wind down was...the pokies".

She started gambling at her workplace on days off, as her friends were unavailable then. "Watching the keno all day...others would watch the TAB...when it's in your face all the time, and you have the punters telling you...it's going to be an issue".

"Most patrons had a gambling problem, too...I felt like I wasn't a massive problem gambler". But, when working in the club restaurant "I wasn't tempted".

"A jackpot was up to \$30,000 so all the staff when they finished work would...have a go," even some who "had never played pokies". "A lot of others would go for the promotions".

"80% (of staff she works with) play the pokies or bet on the TAB...keno is really big". "One-half of that 80% would have gambling problems



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### Question

How would you address some of the responsible gambling training implications from this case?



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### Conclusion & follow on ...

- **Risk and protective factors for the development of problem gambling in gaming venue staff (Dowling, N., Hing, N., Rose, A., Ngo-Nguyen, M., Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation)**
- This project aims to extend on previous research by Nerilee Hing on gambling and gambling problems amongst gaming venue employees.
- It will explore the mediators and moderators associated with the relationship between exposure to gambling and problem gambling by surveying 300 venue staff in Victoria. Staff respondents will be recruited through the VRGF's Venue Workers Support program. The survey commences in September.



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