

INCREASING THE ODDS FOR SAFETY AND RESPECT

Gambling and Family Violence Fact Sheet



Introduction

Both gambling-related harm and family violence represent significant public health issues in Australia. There is also an established link between gambling-related harm and family violence (Dowling et al. 2014, Suomi et al. 2013, Markham et al. 2016).

This fact sheet provides a summary of current information on the link between gambling-related harm and family violence.

Gambling-related harm

- Gambling is a major industry in Australia, generating losses in excess of \$19 billion annually (Productivity Commission, 2010). Electronic Gaming Machines (EGMs) / 'pokies' account for more than half the total losses from all gambling (Brown 2016).
- Most gambling losses are funded not by savings, but by reduced spending on other goods (Brown 2016).
- Gambling-related harm is a major health and social problem for the individual gambler, their family members and friends ('affected others'), and to the broader community. Gambling harms are diverse, have different levels of severity and can affect multiple domains of health and wellbeing.
- According to the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI), 'low-risk' gamblers experience a low level of problems with few identified negative consequences, 'moderate-risk' gamblers experience a moderate level of problems leading to some negative consequences, and 'problem' gamblers gamble with negative consequences and a possible loss of control (Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation 2015a).
- However, it is now known that low and moderate-risk gambling, not only problem gambling, pose substantial risks to the community. In fact, 85% of all gambling-related harm in Victoria is associated with low and moderate-risk gambling, with only 15% of the total harm attributable to problem gambling (Browne et al. 2016).

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Gambling-related harm is any initial or exacerbated adverse consequence due to an engagement with gambling that leads to a decrement to the health or wellbeing of an individual, family unit, community or population.

(Langham et al. 2016: 4)

- According to Browne and colleagues, 'compared to high-profile mental illnesses, low-risk gambling problems are more prevalent than depression, and problem gambling is more than twice as common as schizophrenia... Low-risk gambling problems are present at almost half the prevalence of harmful use of alcohol, which is one of the most prevalent conditions affecting population health in Australia... with problem gambling occurring at just over half the prevalence of alcohol dependence. Therefore, based on prevalence alone, gambling is an issue of similar magnitude to other health conditions of national importance'

(Browne et al. 2016: 144).

- Gamblers experience the majority of harm (86%), while people affected by someone else's gambling account for around 14% of total harm. (Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation 2016a).
- When compared at an individual level with other conditions:
 - Low-risk gambling is considered to have a similar impact to that associated with complete hearing loss, moderate anxiety disorders, amputation of one arm or urinary incontinence.
 - Moderate-risk gambling is considered as harmful as mild alcohol use disorder, or similar to a stroke with both moderate long-term consequences and cognition problems.
 - Problem gambling is comparable to bipolar disorder or migraine (Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation 2016b).
- Prior to the introduction of EGMs, gambling domains were generally made up of racetracks, sport venues and shopfront gaming sites, targeting men more than women. Since the introduction of EGMs, gambling in Australia has become more and more 'feminised' (Banyule Nillumbik Primary Care Alliance 2009).
- Many EGM venues market themselves as particularly safe and comfortable places for women, further contributing to the accessibility and social acceptability of gambling to women, and therefore placing more women at risk of gambling-related harm (Banyule Nillumbik Primary Care Alliance 2009).
- A recent sharp increase in the number of women participating in race betting (from 12% in 2008 to 20% in 2014) may be in part due to the increasing appeal of such betting during the heavily marketed Spring Racing Carnival (Hare 2015).
- In 2014, women were found to be significantly less likely to have gambling-related problems compared to men, with 5.3% of males and 2.1% of females being problem or moderate-risk gamblers (Hare 2015).

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However, more women aged 35–44 reported problem or moderate-risk gambling compared to other age groups (Hare 2015).

- It is now also known that women 55 years and over with low-risk gambling problems account for the largest proportion (14.5%) of gambling-related harm across the community as a whole (Browne et al. 2016).
- There is also a very high prevalence of problem gambling in Victorian indigenous (Koori) communities. Approximately 8.71% of Indigenous people experience problem gambling (Hare 2015).
- For 75–80% of problem gamblers, use of EGMs is the most problematic form of gambling (Productivity Commission 2010: 13).
- The highest concentration of EGMs and the highest losses per head occur in the most socially and economically disadvantaged communities in Victoria.¹

Family violence

The term ‘family violence’ encompasses violence between partners and former partners, as well as violence that occurs between other family members, including siblings, across generations or non-related carers. Family and domestic violence is any violent, threatening, coercive or controlling behaviour. This includes not only physical injury but direct or indirect threats, sexual assault, emotional and psychological abuse, economic control, damage to property, social isolation and any behaviour which causes a person to live in fear (Department of Human Services Victoria 2011).

- Family violence is an enormous problem in our community, with one in four Australian women having experienced physical or sexual violence from a current or former partner (Our Watch, ANROWS & VicHealth 2015).
- One in four Australian women have experienced emotional abuse by a current or former partner.²
- Most violence experienced by women and men is perpetrated by men. For 95% of women and 95% of men who have experienced violence since the age of 15, the perpetrator was male.

¹ Detailed information of losses for each local council area in Victoria can be found at the following website under the heading ‘Gambling’: <http://www.greaterdandenong.com/document/18526/statistics-vic-gambling-venues-machines-and-losses>

² Unless otherwise noted, data in this section has been taken from the report by Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2012) called *Personal Safety Survey*.

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- Women are most likely to be assaulted by a partner or former partner. This type of violence is often referred to as intimate partner violence (IPV).
- An estimated 5.1% of the burden of disease among Australian women aged 18–44 years is due to intimate partner violence (IPV). This includes physical and sexual violence in both cohabiting and non-cohabiting relationships, and emotional abuse in cohabiting relationships. This is more significant than any other risk factor during this stage of a woman's life (Webster 2016).



The negative consequences of intimate partner violence in addition to the health impacts (Webster 2016)

- Family violence is a crime in Victoria. Since 2009/10, family violence referrals to police have more than doubled in Melbourne's Northern and Eastern Metropolitan Regions (NMR and EMR). (Women's Health In the North 2014, Crime Statistics Agency 2016).
- Family violence was the context for at least half of many violent crimes reported in Melbourne's Northern and Eastern Metropolitan Regions in 2015–16. This was the case for 53.2% and 55.2% respectively of all assaults and related offences, 49.4% and 48.4% respectively of all abductions and related offences, and 61% and 55.4% respectively of stalking, harassment and threatening behaviour offences. Of all sexual offences, 40.9% and 39.5% respectively were perpetrated as part of family violence. (Crime Statistics Agency Victoria, 2016).
- There is clear evidence that family violence is a gendered issue. The biggest risk factor for experiencing family violence is being a woman.
- Gender inequality is the recognised driver of violence against women, with specific elements or expressions—termed gendered drivers—being the most consistent predictors of violence against women.



(Our Watch, ANROWS & VicHealth 2015)

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- Addressing the main driver of men's violence against women, namely gender inequality in all its forms, will help to prevent violence against women before it occurs, including family violence. A gender equity focus needs to be central to any efforts aimed at preventing family violence.

The links between gambling-related harm and family violence

Most of the women who come to our service as an affected other of a gambler have experienced family violence, particularly financial abuse.

Anouk Ceppithomas, Senior Financial Counsellor, Banyule Community Health

- Recent Australian research shows that people who have significant problems with their gambling are more likely than people without gambling problems to be either victims or perpetrators of family violence (Dowling 2014).
- Family violence is three times more likely to occur in families in which there is problem gambling than in families in which there are no gambling problems (Dowling et al. 2015).
- Over one third of people with gambling problems report being the victims of physical IPV (38%) or the perpetrators of physical IPV (37%), whilst 11% of offenders of IPV report gambling problems. Furthermore, over half of people with gambling problems report perpetrating physical violence against their children (Dowling et al. 2014).
- There is a direct and significant association between the density of EGM accessibility and the rates of family violence incidents recorded by police in Victoria from 2005–2014 (Markham et al. 2016).
- Victims and perpetrators of family violence use gambling as a coping mechanism (Korman et al. 2008). Research by the Women's Information and Referral Exchange (2008) into women experiencing problem gambling and isolation also suggests that some women who are experiencing family violence use EGM venues as a safe space away from home. These women are then at risk of developing gambling problems due to the addictive nature of EGMs.
- Concerns exist regarding an increasing amount of misogynistic betting advertising aimed at young men, which 'may be propagating or reinforcing attitudes that legitimise behaviours of violence towards women'. (Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, 2015 b)

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We have to act on many fronts to prevent violence against women and children. We see gambling as one of many social factors that contribute to family violence. While gender inequity is at the heart of this complex problem, we need to tackle other social determinants of health as well.

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