

Assessing gambling-related harm in Victoria

The seven dimensions of gambling harm



What is the study?

This project consulted with experts and the community to develop a framework for measuring and assessing the impact of gambling harm in Victoria. The framework can help researchers, policymakers, health professionals and the community better understand and minimise the negative consequences of gambling.

Dimensions of gambling harm

To measure gambling harm, the researchers focused on its outcomes and manifestations.* They identified seven dimensions of harm experienced by people who gamble and those close to them.

The dimensions are listed below with examples of harms under each. The full report has a complete list of harms for each dimension.

While gamblers and people close to them experienced similar harms, gamblers experienced approximately double the harms. Harms experienced within each dimension varied depending on the severity of gambling problems.**

Financial

Harms include:

- reduced spending on recreational activities – this was the least severe financial harm and could be seen as an early sign of experiencing financial harm for gamblers and those close to them
- bankruptcy – this was the most severe financial harm, but was relatively uncommon
- reduced spending on essentials and beneficial items (for example, food, medication, insurance and education) – these were strong signs of financial harm and increased with the severity of gambling problems
- increased credit debt and selling items to fund gambling – these harms also increased with the severity of gambling problems.

Work or study

Harms include:

- reduced performance because of tiredness or distraction – this signified a high level of harm and was related to problem gambling

- absenteeism due to someone else's gambling – while this could relate to other dimensions of harm, such as emotional or psychological, it was an early warning sign
- exclusion from study, loss of job and conflict at work – these were the most severe harms in this dimension for gamblers and those close to them.

Health

Harms include:

- stress, depression and reduced sleep due to worry – these were early warning signs and common among problem gamblers and those close to them
- increased use of health-related services – using health services because of issues caused or exacerbated by gambling was a strong sign of harm for both gamblers and those close to them
- suicidal thoughts, self-harm and the need for emergency treatment – these were the most severe harms in this dimension, but they were relatively uncommon.

Emotional or psychological

Harms include:

- regret – this was an early warning sign for gamblers, while feelings of anger and hopelessness were an early sign for people affected by someone else's gambling
- feelings of worthlessness – this was a strong sign for gamblers and those close to them, implying that people affected by someone else's gambling were emotionally sharing and internalising the damage to self-respect
- feelings of failure, extreme distress, vulnerability and worthlessness – these were the most severe harms in this dimension for both gamblers and those close to them.

Relationships

Harms include:

- conflict within relationships – this was the strongest sign of relationship harm for both gamblers and those close to them, but it was more severe for gamblers
- neglect of responsibilities – while an early sign of relationship harm for gamblers, this indicated a higher level of harm for people close to them

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- belittlement, threat to end the relationship and actual ending of the relationship – these were among the most severe relationship harms for gamblers.

Therefore, no conclusive findings are available for these two dimensions.

Crime and not paying back money were related to problem gambling, while experiences of violence and neglect of children were related to people affected by someone else's problem gambling.

Cultural harm and criminal activities

Both the cultural harm and criminal activities dimensions are diverse and a relatively small number of respondents reported experiencing harms in these dimensions.

* For more information about the framework for measuring gambling harm, see fact sheet 1: A conceptual framework of gambling harm.

** The categories for risk of gambling harm used in this study are based on the Problem Gambling Severity Index. They are:

- non-problem gambler – gambles with no negative consequences
- low-risk gambler – experiences a low level of problems with few or no identified negative consequences
- moderate-risk gambler – experiences a moderate level of problems leading to some negative consequences
- problem gambler – gambles with negative consequences and a possible loss of control.

For more information about these categories, see the full report or the *Study of gambling and health in Victoria* fact sheet 2: Categories for risk of gambling harm.