

# **Gambling in two Victorian regional Australian Aboriginal communities**

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## Background

- In 2017/8 MDAS and GEGAC commissioned La Trobe to collaborate on two separate studies of gambling and how communities could respond. Together we wrote two reports, one with GEGAC investigating issues for young people and one with MDAS focused on all age groups.
- In collaboration with MDAS staff we wrote an article on bingo that drew on the MDAS findings (Maltzahn et al, 2018)
- Today we report on findings across both studies.

## This presentation

- Other studies of Aboriginal people's experiences of gambling (Sarah MacLean)
- Experiences at Lake Tyers (Andrew Atkinson)
- Our research method and approach
- What our participants told us
- How to apply the study's findings to our practice through Yarning Circles (Darleen Thomas)

# Literature on Indigenous peoples and harm from gambling

- Gambling is commonly practiced in some Aboriginal communities and seen as a normal activity (Hing and Breen, 2014; Williams et al., 2016). For some Indigenous people, gambling venues may also be one of the few places they feel they are treated with respect (McDonald, 2006).
- It is critical to recognise the impact of historical and socio-economic factors on gambling harm (Nagel, 2011; Robertson, 2005; Dyall, 2010; McGowan, 2004)
- As in mainstream communities, gambling by Aboriginal people has been linked with experiences such as traumatic childhood events, unemployment, and exclusion, as well as with mental health difficulties and alcohol and drug use (Hing et al., 2014; Larsen et al., 2013; McMillen and Donnelly, 2008b).
- Public health approaches have limits for Indigenous communities, as the specificities of their experiences can be lost in population-level initiatives (Breen, 2013).
- Very few studies of gambling in regional Victorian communities have been conducted.

# Andrew Atkinson – Why this research is important to me and my Community



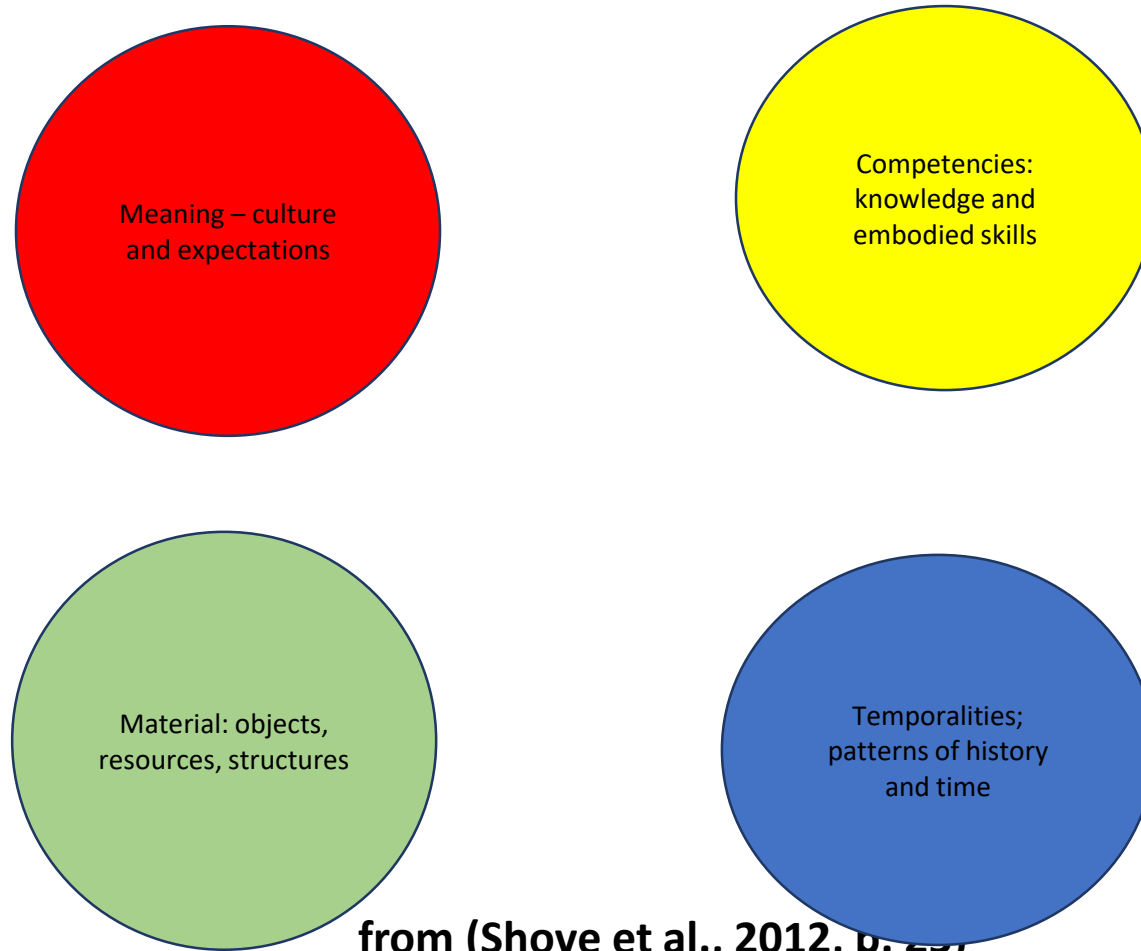
## Collaborative research method

- Two Aboriginal community-controlled health organisations (MDAS and GEGAC) negotiated to use funding from VRGF to conduct research exploring gambling impacts and potential responses to gambling within their communities.
- Study purpose and designs were agreed on at workshops with each of MDAS and GEGAC.
- La Trobe staff visited each service to train staff in interviewing skills and to revise the interview schedules to ensure appropriateness and that the right questions were asked.
- After interviews were conducted they were transcribed and an initial analysis was undertaken.
- Further workshops between LTU and agency staff were held to formulate findings and recommendations.

## The interviews

	MDAS	GEGAC	Total
<b>Total interviewees</b>	26	24	50
<b>Adult community members</b>	16	-	16
<b>Young community members</b>	-	8	8
<b>Professional staff</b>	10	16	26
<b>Males</b>	10	12	22
<b>Individual interview</b>	24	20	44
<b>Pair interview</b>	2	4	6

# Social Practice Theory





# Coding our data using Social Practice Theory

## **‘Meaning, culture and expectations**

*Social opportunities with family and community:*

My nan goes all the time... she likes going because it's sort of a socialising environment for other Aboriginal people too that they haven't seen or someone other than family too they socialise with (MDAS interviewee)

*Leads to poverty and conflict:*

They blow all their money and come out and they are angry and they, really angry because they've spent all the bill money, or they've spent all the food money or something. (GEGAC interview, worker)

*Gambling problems are shameful*

You only hear about the wins. It's only socially acceptable when you have a big win. When you've lost, it's a shame job. You don't want to tell anyone you've just blown \$200' [FB, female, worker]. GEGAC

*This is sometimes related to loss of culture*

# Material: objects, resources, structures

*Gambling offers hope of winning money*

'a quick fix or a quick buck' [male worker, MDAS]

*Venues are welcoming places*

She's that well known now sort of they roll the red carpet out for her, that sort of thing, that's the thing with the club if you're a regular, you know, they know you by your first name and then they treat you just like one of the family...(MDAS interview )

*Gambling (especially pokies) as an addiction.*

I don't know if it was the noises, the flashes, or whatever it was, but I think I was hooked from the moment I went in there. (young man, GEGAC)

*The wider world as an addictive environment for gambling*

I think it is, with those [online] sites, you don't physically, you're not physically spending your money so you're not keeping track of it so that probably could be worse than going actually to the pokies cause there you've got a limit on how much you can spend in the venue ... (GEGAC)

# Competence; knowledge and embodied skills

*People use gambling as a way to reduce boredom*

Well up here in the country they do it because there's nothing else to do, the boredom but I know that those people who play cards and bingo and that, they teach their kids how to gamble. So it runs in their veins, in their blood. (MDAS interview)

*Gambling is a way of managing negative emotions and experiences*

It's kind of like to do with a lot of depression, like, somebody feels depressed and they want to go get a drink or do some drugs, make them feel a bit better so pretty much gambling is the exact same. You're feeling down and out so you just want to go and try your luck and see if you win some money and if you do you're on cloud nine and by the time it's all gone then you're back to feeling the same (MDAS interview).

*Kids learn how to gamble from a young age*

I actually don't really like them because my grandson is only two years old and he already knows about pokies... That's what I tell my daughter, like he's asked for mine and I will not let him touch my phone. Yeah, cause I don't have the pokies on it and he'll say you want to play pokies nan.... (GEGAC, Morwell interview)

That's just normal. People they see it as normal. Cause they like to see their kids win so they teach them how to win (MDAS interview).

# Temporal; patterns over time

## *Part of the community's history*

I remember when I was younger at Lake Tyres we'd play two up all night, under car lights. And then play poker all night then, outside, play two up and at dusk we'd turn the car lights on, so we could see the pennies drop, and inside playing cards all night. (GEGAC interview)

## *Gambling is linked to payday*

Yeah and a lot of people, lot of people aren't like that, soon as they get up, they've got their money, even some people's money comes in at night time you know, they go get their money and go straight to The Gateway, pressing. (MDAS interview)

## *Available at all hours*

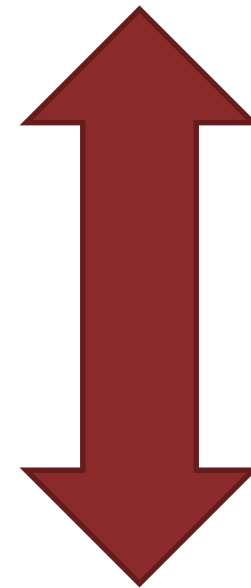
24 hour, yeah that's the worst thing. I got a friend, his mum she's got a real bad gambling problem, she doesn't see that she has cause she works. She goes to the pokies on Friday and Saturday nights until three o'clock in the morning, that's here in town, that's really bad, yeah. (MDAS interview,)

All of these are important (detailed in our reports)

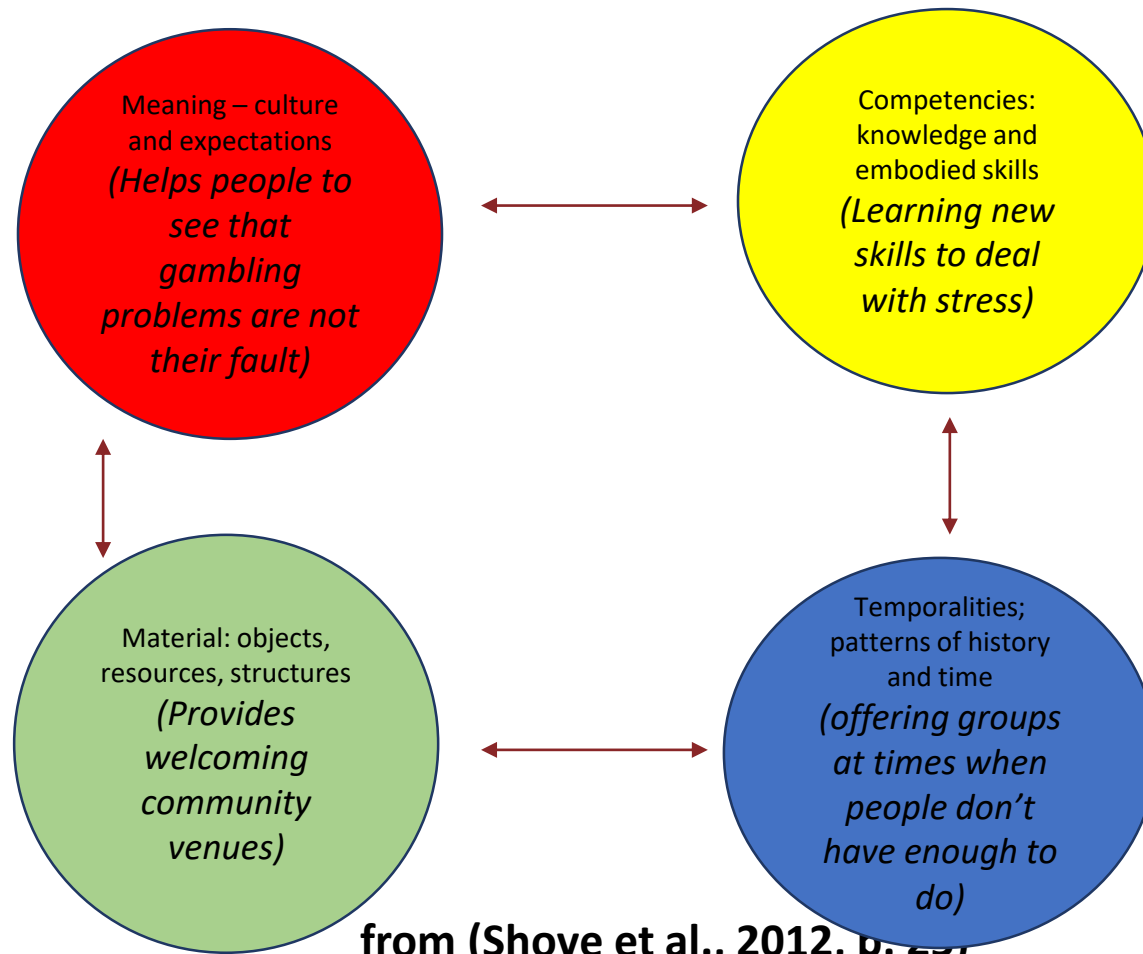
Structural interventions (supply; licensing;  
venues)

Community interventions to break links in  
gambling practices (ie yarning circles)

Individual interventions (culturally safe and  
accessible counselling)



# Yarning circles – an alternative social practice



# Conclusions

Our participants stressed that most effective responses to gambling entail better regulation of venues and opening hours and addressing trauma and disadvantage.

Aboriginal people's experiences of gambling in regional settings have much in common with those of non-Indigenous people who are also experiencing poverty and marginalisation. For Aboriginal people, this intersects with trauma, historical factors and ongoing exclusion from mainstream community, sharing of money, the importance of opportunities to meet with community in welcoming places, and shame about seeking help.

We need to think of ways to talk about gambling harm while reassuring people that some forms (ie bingo) may be safer than others (ie pokies).

We recommended that services be orientated to promote community discussion on gambling rather than individualised treatment, offering alternative activities (particularly at night), using a community engagement model and strengthening knowledge in the community about self-exclusion from venues.

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