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GAMBLING AMONGST GAMING VENUE EMPLOYEES: COUNSELLORS' PERSPECTIVES ON RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS IN THE WORKPLACE

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Abstract:
This paper reports on Stage One of a project examining the gambling behaviour of employees in Queensland gaming venues and how aspects of their workplace might influence that behaviour, to identify how gaming venues can provide a work environment that encourages responsible gambling amongst employees. From interviews with 32 gambling counsellors, 40 risk factors for gambling problems, 15 protective factors against gambling problems and 14 venue strategies for encouraging responsible gambling amongst employees were identified. A number of broad conclusions can be reached. First, staff who work in gaming venues appear an at-risk group for problem gambling. Second, this risk stems from a variety of factors relating to working in a gambling environment. Third, numerous workplace factors also protect some staff by deterring them from gambling, by minimising harmful behaviours and by improving informed consent. Finally, there are strategies venues can implement to better encourage responsible gambling amongst their staff.

Key words: employee gambling; gambling workplace; risk factors, protective factors

Introduction

Gaming venues worldwide employ substantial numbers of staff whose work environment is distinctive due to their ongoing exposure to gambling. However, the gambling behaviour of gaming venue staff has attracted minimal research. Only three related studies previously have been published, all based on North American casino employees. Their results indicate that problem gambling is relatively high amongst this group, although little was reported about the reasons for this. Yet there are numerous workplace factors which may elevate the risk of gambling problems for gaming venue employees, such as close interaction with gamblers and frequent exposure to gambling-related marketing. Equally, other workplace factors may mitigate these influences, such as heightened awareness of the odds of winning and losing and of responsible gambling measures.

This paper reports on a study funded by the Queensland Government in Australia into the gambling behaviour of staff who work in gaming venues. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first Australian research to examine the gambling behaviour of gaming venue employees, and the first worldwide to examine how working in a gaming venue might influence that behaviour and identify aspects of that work environment that can encourage

responsible gambling and discourage problem gambling amongst gaming venue staff. The research employs qualitative methodologies to gather data from problem gambling counsellors and some clients who work in gaming venues, gaming venue employees and managers, industry associations, and the key employee union in Queensland. While the project will not be completed until mid-2006, this paper reports on Stage One – interviews with problem gambling counsellors, conducted during April and May 2005. This paper firstly reviews previous research into gambling by gaming venue staff, highlights a public health perspective towards gambling and outlines some preliminary investigation undertaken to help shape the research project. The paper then articulates the research aims and objectives, explains the methodology for Stage One, and presents the related results.

Prior Research into Gambling by Gaming Venue Staff

While little is known about the gambling behaviour of gaming venue employees, models of gambling involvement (e.g. Productivity Commission, 1999; Blaszczynski and Nower, 2002) identify environmental factors as influencing that involvement. Thus, the work environment in gaming venues may also influence the gambling behaviour of employees. However, very little research has been conducted into whether gaming venue employees are more or less likely to gamble, or to be low, medium or high risk gamblers, or to experience gambling problems. Only three related empirical studies have been published: Collachi and Taber (1987) asked 34 employees from three large casinos in Reno about their frequency of gambling, gambling habits, opinions of others who gamble, and gambling itself. Although many findings were consistent with problem gambling (e.g. borrowing money between paydays), no consistent, quantifiable instrument was used to measure problem gambling.

Shaffer, Vander Bilt and Hall (1999) examined the prevalence of pathological gambling, drinking, smoking and other health risk behaviours amongst casino employees, surveying 3,841 full-time casino employees from four sites of one casino. The study found that the casino employees had a higher prevalence of past-year level 3 (pathological) gambling (2.1%), but a lower prevalence of level 2 (problem) gambling (1.4%), than the general adult population, when measured on the SOGS.

Duquette (2000) surveyed 271 employees of one hotel/casino in Las Vegas, also using the SOGS. The rate of pathological gambling amongst these employees was found to be 20.3%, compared to 1.14% for the general adult population.

Evidence from these studies suggests that gaming venue employees may be an at-risk group for developing gambling problems. However, no research has been conducted into the gambling behaviour of gaming venue employees in Australia, and none of the cited studies examined how particular aspects of the work environment in gambling venues might influence that behaviour. Understanding these aspects of the work environment can assist in developing strategies and identifying pathways to providing a work environment conducive to responsible gambling amongst employees in gaming venues, and that helps to minimise harm, promote informed consent, discourage problem gambling behaviour and minimise its adverse consequences. With these research needs in mind, the authors undertook some preliminary investigation to clarify potential issues and themes.

A Public Health Perspective towards Gambling

A public health perspective towards gambling and its associated risks and benefits, Korn and Shaffer (1999) argue, should include assessing social and economic factors such as income, employment and poverty as well as the more usual behavioural and biological factors. From this public health view, policy makers can then decide between acceptable and unacceptable risks and design comprehensive strategies for effective harm prevention and treatment of problems associated with risky gambling (Korn and Shaffer, 1999). The public health perspective encourages the use of a conceptual continuum to the range of risk and protective factors that can influence the development and continuation of gambling related problems (Korn and Shaffer, 1999). Further, the Thomas and Jackson (2004) model for identifying influences on gambling behaviours as a guide for attaining greater accuracy in targeting interventions shows clearly that protective, moderating and risk factors greatly affect gambling propensity, uptake and outcomes. The identification and understanding of risk and protective factors, Thomas and Jackson (2004) say, helps in finding potential and appropriate interventions to change those factors able to be changed.

A recent example of public health principles in use can be seen in the final recommendations made by the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal of New South Wales (IPART) (2004). In assessing the effectiveness of problem gambling harm minimisation measures in New South Wales (NSW) this tribunal was guided by public health principles of reducing unacceptable risk (the likelihood of gambling problems emerging), while allowing acceptable risk (permitting people the right to enjoy gambling as a legal recreation activity). The Tribunal made three major recommendations – to promote the level of 'informed choice' by gamblers; to protect gamblers from risky behaviours resulting in negative consequences and possibly problem gambling; and, to improve problem gambling counselling services (IPART, 2004). These recommendations reflect a public health stance of encouraging protective factors such as providing the community with education and information; reducing risk factors such as making the games and gambling environment safer; and providing appropriate treatment for those with gambling problems.

There are costs and benefits associated with gambling activities. In fact the Productivity Commission (1999) when examining the social and economic impacts of gambling said that it sought ways to reduce social costs of gambling without reducing the benefits. Public health promotion strategies are developed to help individuals and communities control and improve their general well-being (World Health Organization [WHO], 1986). Public health promotion strategies for gambling are designed and implemented to help balance these costs and benefits (Korn and Shaffer, 1999). Five important strategies for public health promotion include – building a healthy public policy; creating supportive environments; strengthening community action; developing personal skills; and reorienting health services (Korn and Shaffer, 1999). Taking the second strategy, creating supportive environments, Korn and Shaffer (1999) maintain that gambling venue owners and operators could implement policy and program initiatives to foster healthier leisure environments for both customers and employees. They suggest that local government health departments could contribute to building healthier gambling environments and workplaces through employee health programs and smoke free policies.

Korn and Shaffer (1999) propose three public health goals to focus attention on prevention, health promotion and community protection in regard to gambling. They include:

- Prevention of unacceptable risk - to prevent the risk of people developing gambling related problems using public awareness, early identification and provision of treatment services;
- Heath promotion strategies - to promote informed and balanced decision-making by gamblers through increased knowledge, responsible choices and community participation; and,
- Community protective factors - to protect vulnerable groups from gambling-related harms through responsible gambling policy, community support programs and public safety.

These three goals support the concept of gambling harm minimisation as explained by Blaszczynski, Sharp and Walker (2001). They argue that gambling harm minimisation should have many aims including – to prevent the development of gambling problems; to reduce the prevalence of problem gamblers in the community; to reduce negative health and social consequences for problems gamblers, their families and communities; to maintain the enjoyment of gambling by recreational gamblers; and, to ensure that the livelihood of people working in the gaming industry is not compromised unnecessarily. Thus, concepts and strategies from the public health literature linked to gambling research contribute to understanding the theoretical base of this investigation in terms of risk factors, protective factors and strategies to encourage responsible gambling yet discourage risky gambling.

Preliminary Investigation

For the authors, interest in this project was heightened by a casual conversation with a local gambling counsellor who noted that about 25% of the clients she had seen in the previous six months work in gaming venues and/or developed gambling problems while working in gaming venues. Soon after that, a croupier we interviewed who had worked in a Queensland casino for 19 years estimated that 20-30% of that casino's gaming staff 'would have gambling problems they can't control'. An opportunity then arose to interview a client from a gambling counselling agency who works in gaming venues. Over about one and a half hours, the client discussed various aspects of working in hotels and clubs that had initiated and sustained her gambling problems. A further preliminary step was to hold a focus group with seven of our university students who had worked or were currently working in gaming venues, including a casino, hotels, clubs and a Totalisator Agency Board (TAB) outlet. This preliminary work proved a valuable exercise in identifying aspects of the work environment in gaming venues that appear to influence the gambling behaviour of employees and so assisted in the project design.

Research Aims and Objectives

The project was designed with the overall aim of examining the gambling behaviour of employees in Queensland gaming venues and how aspects of their workplace might influence that behaviour, in order to identify how gaming venues can provide a work environment that encourages responsible gambling and discourages problem gambling amongst their employees.

More specifically, the project addresses the following research objectives:

To investigate the gambling behaviour of Queensland gaming venue employees, particularly in terms of responsible gambling and problem gambling.

To examine how Queensland gaming venue employees perceive that aspects of their work environment influence their gambling behaviour in terms of responsible gambling and problem gambling.

To examine how Queensland gaming venue employers/managers perceive that aspects of their venue's work environment influence their employees' gambling behaviour in terms of responsible gambling and problem gambling.

To identify how gaming venues can provide a work environment that encourages responsible gambling and discourages problem gambling by gaming venue employees.

To address these aims and objectives, a qualitative study was designed that draws on multiple stakeholder views, as noted earlier. It focuses on gambling by employees of Queensland clubs, hotels and casinos, which collectively operate gaming machines, TAB outlets, keno outlets, table games, sportsbetting facilities and bingo. At the time of writing, only Stage One was complete and this paper now focuses on the associated methodology and results.

Methodology for Stage One

With the support of the Queensland Gambling Help network, we approached the 40 Queensland gambling counsellors they identified to request a telephone interview. Of these, 32 agreed. These comprised gambling counsellors, addictions counsellors, relationship or family therapy counsellors, and gambling community education or liaison officers. The agencies they represented had been operating for 2-12 years; each employed 1-4 counsellors, and each agency saw 100-580 clients per year.

Each telephone interview lasted 30-60 minutes and they were either taped or extensive notes were taken. From our preliminary work (the interviews, focus group and a literature review), an interview schedule was developed that asked about four main areas:

Characteristics of clients they had seen who work or have worked in gaming venues, including their age, sex, venue type, position held and preferred type of gambling;

Clients' experiences, based on various aspects of the work environment they had mentioned as having influenced their gambling behaviour;

Counsellor opinions on whether and how various aspects of working in gaming venues are likely to influence employee gambling behaviour; and

Venue strategies that could encourage responsible gambling and discourage gambling problems amongst gaming venue employees.

A semi-structured approach was taken when interviewing. Based on themes that emerged from the preliminary work, the counsellors were questioned about the following aspects of the work environment, but they were also free to raise additional themes they considered pertinent:
Close interaction with gamblers
Frequent exposure to gambling
Influence of fellow employees

Influence of management
Nature of employee work
Hours of work
Frequent exposure to gambling marketing and promotions
Responsible gambling training of staff
Responsible gambling strategies in the venue

The interviews were transcribed and responses then grouped under each question in the interview schedule. A thematic analysis was then conducted to uncover major themes and sub-themes that the data revealed. Because this was very exploratory research, given the dearth of previous work in this area, the analysis focused on identifying pertinent issues, with no attempt made to quantify the results. In fact, a follow-up study is planned to provide a quantitative perspective on the issue.

The characteristics of gaming venue staff treated by the counsellors are now presented, followed by the major themes and sub-themes that emerged. These are grouped into apparent risk factors in the workplace, apparent protective factors in the workplace, and suggested venue strategies to encourage responsible gambling amongst staff.

Client Characteristics

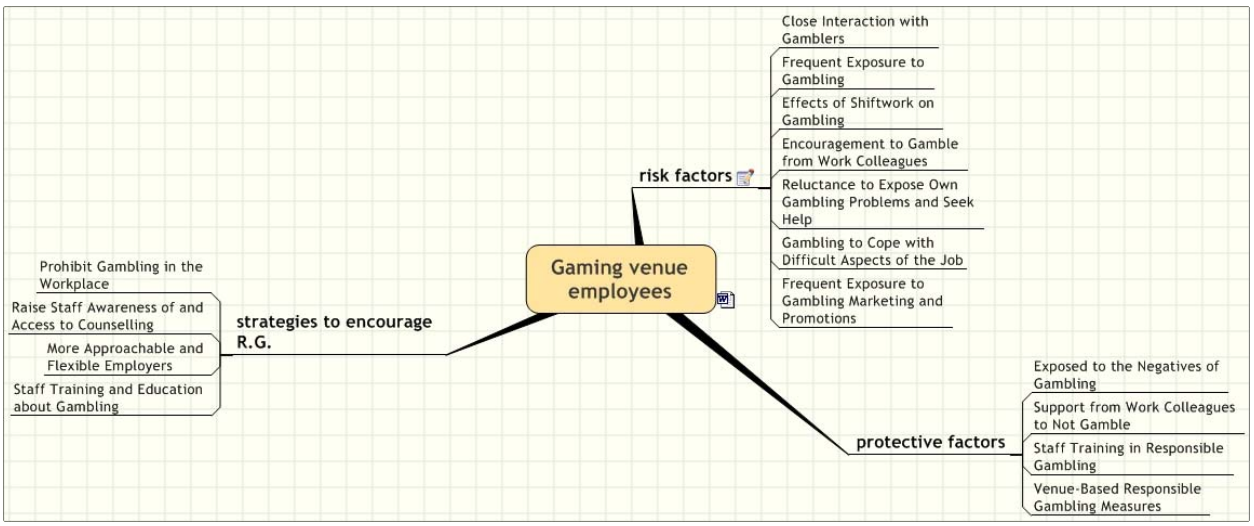
When the counsellors were asked for the proportion of clients they had ever seen who work or have worked in gaming venues, the most common response was 5-10% (with the range from 0% to 20%). Some counsellors had seen no gaming venue employees, while others had seen up to12 employees during their professional careers. However, in the absence of official statistics, these figures are an estimation based on the counsellors' best recall and so should be viewed with caution.

The gaming venue clients included both males and females and all age groups, although most were 18-50 years, the most common ages for gaming venue employment. They represented a wide range of positions including: senior positions such as pub owner-manager, TAB agency manager and club manager; supervisory positions including hotel gaming manager, duty manager and floor manager; front-of-house staff including gaming attendant, gaming room floor staff, bar attendant, croupier, glass collector, waitress, customer service agent and cashier; and back-of-house positions including chef, cleaner, stage props worker, kitchenhand and apprentice. Thus, staff who do and do not work in positions directly related to gambling were both represented amongst the counsellors' clients. These clients had worked at hotels, clubs, casinos and in TAB outlets. Most had problems with gaming machines, with a sizeable minority experiencing problems relating to TAB betting and casino table games. A few had problems with keno and one with bingo.

Major Themes Emerging From Stage One

Figure 1 shows the major themes that emerged from the data analysis. These and their associated sub-themes are discussed below, drawing on numerous quotes from the interviews that add depth and explanation.

Figure 1: Major Themes Emerging from the Research



Apparent Risk Factors in the Workplace

The counsellor interviews revealed a variety of workplace factors that appear to raise the risk of gambling problems amongst gaming venue staff, with 79% of interviewees who were asked stating that venue staff are a more at-risk group for developing gambling problems than the general population (21% said they did not know).

Risk Factor 1: Close Interaction With Gamblers

The provision of gambling services requires customer involvement in the service delivery system, where that service is produced by the venue and consumed by the gambler simultaneously. This means many employees in these venues, particularly frontline operational staff, have close interactions with gamblers and engage in 'real' social exchanges, particularly with regular patrons (Korczynski, 2002). This close interaction with gamblers may influence employee gambling behaviour in various ways, as reflected in the five sub-themes related to this first risk factor.

Distorted views about winning. Seeing gamblers winning might prompt some employees to consider gambling as a logical strategy for financial betterment. Compared to the relatively modest wages they typically earn, gamblers' winnings may seem like 'easy money'. Further, staff typically hear about wins more than losses and may thus gain favourably distorted views on the prospects of winning. For example, one counsellor reported that one client 'made a comment…that all she has seen is the winners. This client worked at the window in a poker machine venue. And what she saw was people getting cheques and having wins, because she said the losers sneak out'. Similarly, another counsellor told of a 'lady who was a cashier, the one paying out the prize money, so she was in a position where she thought everyone was winning'.

Caught up in the excitement of wins. Some employees are seemingly attracted to gambling because of the excitement that can surround a win in a gambling venue. As one counsellor noted, one TAB manager 'used to make her bets prior to opening…(and) watch

on the monitors what was happening, and people placing bets, and the excitement when someone won. …It was kind of getting caught up in the excitement for her.' Another counsellor observed that 'people can get pretty loud when they win. It can work as triggers for some people', and another that 'emotionally they felt compelled to go (gambling). They would talk about seeing people win, so were exposed to frequent winners.'

Hearing about gambling. It appears that gaming venue staff often hear much talk around gambling. Two examples from the counsellor interviews reflect this conversational interaction, particularly for casino table games and in a TAB setting. One commented that 'the croupier…was really into listening to gamblers and their thinking around systems, the tall stories, their bragging about how much they had won…' and another that 'at the TAB there is a lot of exchange of information. What gets up and what doesn't. It is a culture that impacts staff around betting.'

Identifying with gamblers. If staff are gamblers, they tend to identify with gamblers at the venue. One counsellor commented that 'they don't mind if there is a fellow gambler there. It gives them that sense of - you're okay, but people who frown on my behaviour I don't like.' Another noted that 'often the pub is the only place to go and that is where you meet friends. So if you work there…if you have susceptibility in that area…then being around gamblers and the whole milieu definitely stimulates gamblers.' Another considered 'there is a particular culture that builds around gambling. Around the TAB it is bizarre; they develop a relationship with the regulars.'

Wanting a piece of the action. Other staff, it seems, are just tempted because gambling looks like fun - 'it gets their adrenaline flowing and they can become emotionally charged.' Another interviewee explained that 'what they talk about is that they see people having fun, and they want a piece of that. And that is an influence on them doing the same behaviour'.

Risk Factor 2: Frequent Exposure to Gambling

The established link between problem gambling and proximity, availability and accessibility of gambling (e.g. VCGA, 2000; Griffiths and Delfabbro, 2001, National Opinion Research Center, 1999; Volberg, 1994; Emerson and Laundergan, 1996, Cosby, 1995) suggests that gaming venue employees may be a high risk group given their frequent exposure to gambling. For example, Shaffer *et al.* (1999) found that employees who had worked in a casino for 3.5 to 4 years had a significantly higher prevalence of pathological and problem gambling than employees who had worked there for one year or less. Seven sub-themes emerged from the counsellor interviews that help to explain why frequent exposure to gambling may put gaming venue staff at risk of gambling problems.

Access to gambling. It seems some staff have easy access to gambling and therefore 'the temptation that is always there.' Some counsellors reported that some of their clients who worked in TAB outlets or sections gambled in their workplace, as did some managers. One interviewee explained that 'their role in the place…gave them easier access to ready cash and to gambling activities'. Even if staff are not allowed to gamble in their workplace, 'the issue is around availability. Most did not gamble in venues where they worked. When they worked, they had contact with gamblers, and then when they finished work they'd go somewhere else (to gamble).'

Lights, music, atmosphere. Constant exposure to the lights, music and atmosphere surrounding gambling can also play a part, as do the 'all the Pavlovian conditioning type things' associated with gaming machines. As one counsellor explained, 'subtle psychological techniques…used in the gaming room…very powerful intermittent reward, machines that make the jackpot sound even when no one is sitting at the machine, which is the reward sound. Gaming machines are hypnotic…and the gaming room is set up as a different world, with no natural light, no clocks… does all of that influence croupiers and other staff? Very probably.' Another offered the view that 'auditory stimuli - jingling bells that go off continually…condition people into thinking that gambling is a good way to make a living.' Another noted that some gaming venue clients had mentioned 'exposure to the lights and the machines, stimulation from the gaming room…' as contributing to their problems.

Surrounded by gambling. For some clients, just being surrounded by gambling appeared to cause or exacerbate problems. For example, one counsellor commented 'I think that is exactly what it was for her. It was constant; there was no actual break from that', another that 'one of my clients did say that just hanging around it made it seem like it was a good idea', and another that 'it's an in your face entertainment option for people working in venues.'

Familiar, comforting environment. Some counsellors commented that working in a gaming venue makes it a familiar, comforting environment to be in when staff want to relax - 'they feel familiar with the venue. Other venues become family.' Another explained that 'one of the things that influences their gambling behaviour is…their familiarity in the environment. They feel really comfortable in it, so when they want to unwind or relax they want to be in a similar environment.'

Normalises gambling. A major concern for counsellors was that this frequent exposure can 'normalise gambling for staff'. One commented that 'because they are in that environment all the time and are selling a product, they have to adjust. And that does have an effect on their thinking around gambling. It encourages them to see it as a good form of recreation.' Another was of the view that 'it desensitises them, particularly to the wins and losses.' Another explained that 'being flooded by gambling information may also play an important role in determining a person's rate of involvement. It is so much a part of their daily routine, their daily life.'

Normalises heavy gambling. For some of the clients, heavy gambling had become the norm where 'if there are regular patrons in there on a daily basis that do gamble excessively, and they are constantly seeing that, then it normalises that more for them'. 'It does normalise a style of play because they are exposed to people who play machines for a long period of time and with a lot of money', explained another counsellor. Another considered that 'seeing people betting more than they (the clients) could afford certainly makes it more acceptable. They lose sight of the value of money in this environment.'

Perceived insider knowledge. Working around gambling may lead some employees to 'think they have insider knowledge' about gambling' and develop 'all sorts of odd theories about the winning'. One counsellor shared her experience with a 'fairly senior manager at (X) Casino' who 'talks about how he knows how to beat the system, in certain games'. That counsellor thought 'maybe there is a culture of that, particularly among males.' Another noted that 'people are prone to magical thinking when gambling. The culture

supports the ideas. It is almost that group think. You see it with religion, etc. and it also occurs with gambling.'

Risk Factor 3: Encouragement To Gamble From Work Colleagues

No research has been conducted to determine whether gaming venue employees gamble more or less than the general population. However, employees who choose to work in gaming venues are typically not opposed to gambling *per se*, and indeed some may have sought work there because of a pre-existing interest in or attraction to gambling (Shaffer *et al.*, 1999). Indeed, Wexler and Wexler (2004) contend that some employees are 'attracted to the action, because they already have a gambling problem', while Shaffer *et al*. (1999) speculate that 'workers with gambling problems may be more likely to choose to remain employed in a setting that offers ready access to gambling'. Thus, many employees in gaming venues may be favourably disposed towards gambling and wittingly or unwittingly encourage other workers to gamble. Seven sub-themes explain how this may occur.

Staff gambling together. Employees may encourage other staff by inviting them to gamble with them outside of working hours, perhaps after work to 'unwind'. For example, one counsellor noted that 'several of them have said that what they do as a group is go to another venue and gamble…after work', and another that 'I have had people talk about how when they socialise with other people from the venue they end up drinking and gambling with them, because that is what they do when they get off work.' It appears that some of this after-work gambling occurs in the workplace in circumstances where 'the staff seemed to be okay with gambling in their own venue. The staff would gamble together.'

Gambling to gain acceptance into the workgroup. Others take up gambling to gain acceptance amongst work colleagues, as 'you want to be seen as belonging to the people that are in your life, and if it is a culture where we finish work and we all go over to the pokies or whatever, then you want to be seen as part of it.'

General acceptance of gambling. As one interviewee explained, 'there is more of an acceptance of gambling of course, with staff in venues. That it is perhaps more acceptable to them than it is to the general population, to spend time gambling. And so to spend time gambling excessively is the next step.'

Staff introduce them to gambling. In some cases, staff introduce other staff or new staff to gambling. 'It can be an introductory thing, but it is where they take it from there…' pondered one interviewee.

Industry attracts gamblers. A few interviewees commented that perhaps the industry attracts gamblers. As one noted, 'it is a chicken or egg scenario. …Some people have gambling problems before they work in the industry.'

Industry attracts outgoing people. Others noted that the industry attracts outgoing, fun loving people where 'people in that industry have a very partying kind of attitude. …they are very into "live for the moment, have a good time" so I could see how people could get hooked into it', and 'they were fun, outgoing people…. So I guess, they strike me as being the kind of people who might get into that kind of thing more than the average people.' Another counsellor related how 'my croupier (client) comes to mind…amongst the younger gamblers they can often be flying high on ecstasy at the same time.'

Managers gambling. Some counsellors noted that gambling by managers does occur in the workplace, that 'I have certainly heard of managers who are big punters' and 'I know a few pub owners, they've grown up in that whole pub industry, it's normal to put bets on.' Where managers gamble, this can lead to problems for themselves or encourage other staff to gamble. As one counsellor related, 'I have been to venues where the staff play and the managers play and they play together, and we all have a go, and it can start out as that social thing and develop from there.'

Risk Factor 4: Gambling to Cope with Particular Aspects of the Job

Frontline workers in general are subject to considerable stress arising from the emotional labour required in their jobs (Korczynski 2002), and gaming venue employees elsewhere have reported high levels of stress, irritability, moodiness and exhaustion after work, along with sleep and appetite problems (Keith *et al.* 2001). Most counsellors noted various workplace stressors and other distinctive aspects of the job that may influence staff gambling behaviour. Seven sub-themes were related to this.

Stress about problem gamblers. Seeing people with gambling problems, frustration at their inability to help them, dealing with patrons upset over losses, and guilt over encouraging patrons to gamble were all stresses faced by gaming venue staff that the counsellors identified as potentially impacting on their gambling behaviour. For example, one noted that 'people talk about knowing people who have problems. That stresses people out, what can they do about it? They're often told not to approach people.' In a similar vein, another considered that 'staff build relationships with people in venues and it can be pretty hard when they see someone who they perceive to be in trouble, and they get frustrated not being able to do something about it.' Another commented that 'another workplace stress in the actual gaming room is patrons who are upset, and the guilt that staff can carry with that.'

Stress from emotional labour. Frontline workers engage in emotional labour where 'there is an expectation that they're constantly pleasant, and meet the needs of the patron. They are focused on other people. Gambling becomes something they can do themselves'. Other interviewees noted the challenges associated with dealing with difficult customers, where 'there is a lot of stress in the industry when people are being asked to be polite, to be nice to clients, and it is not a reciprocal thing.' Another explained that 'they would have to be working with some highly demanding people or difficult situations, and usually there is alcohol involved, and certainly if it is a gambling related issue - it may be because they've lost their rent money or their whole pay - there are a lot of high emotions involved in that work.' An alternative interpretation was offered by another counsellor, that staff 'get out there and try to present as extroverts, but (some) are probably not. It could be that these people are actually at risk of developing some sort of dependency on drinking or gambling to help mask some of that pain about how they really feel.'

Stress from heavy workloads. Other workplace stressors arise from some heavy workloads in gaming venues, including long hours, busy tiring work, being constantly 'on the go', and coping with understaffing and sudden influxes of patrons, where '…the context of the environment generates lots of pressure. Staff do not have a lot of control over their work, and a lack of control generates stress.' Another noted that 'the folks I've seen do really long hours. Partly because if they're on casual, they take the work that is available.' Another mentioned that 'those stresses can be a…heavy workload, to an influx

of customers, one person on, seven people waiting, having to manage your time, the situation, their emotions, they can't relax. So certainly I do think stress does play a part.'

Job dissatisfaction/boredom. It appears that some employees gamble to cope with general job dissatisfaction or boredom with what can be 'mind-numbing', routine, low status work where employees typically lack control over their work and have a multitude of rules to adhere to. As one counsellor explained, 'I have seen a number of clients…in the gaming industry who are dissatisfied with their work but are stuck…and that growing dissatisfaction has a huge impact on their gambling behaviour. It is that depression that set in.' Another, commenting on a client who gambled at the TAB outlet which she managed, explained that 'it was fairly routine, fairly mundane sort of stuff. So what are you going to do when you are bored? You're going to participate.' Other sources of job dissatisfaction mentioned included transient staff and managers, difficult relationships with co-workers or bosses, office politics, and feeling unappreciated.

Low pay. Some interviewees thought that the modest pay received by many workers in gaming venues presented a temptation to gamble, 'because of the stuff around not being well paid – being delusional – needing to create extra income.'

Access to cash. Other counsellors considered that access to cash in gaming venues presented a temptation for staff to gamble - 'there was just having access to the cash. That was the big issue.' Another considered 'the availability of accessing their pay at the ATM in the workplace - that was the main thing.' Some counsellors referred to staff who had been caught credit betting or stealing from their workplace to gamble - 'it was easy access to the cash…and then they started chasing, so they had to take more money to get back what they were after' and 'what I do see are reports from the courts about venue staff who have gambled on their work premises and are being charged for stealing or other crimes committed in the employer's venue, to finance their gambling'.

A drinking culture. Other interviewees commented on the role of drinking amongst staff that may in turn influence their gambling. One noted that ' they probably drink more and drink more often. In itself that would contribute', while another speculated that 'if they were to have a…drink after work, that could increase the likelihood that they could gamble'. Another interviewee told of a client who 'would associate relaxing with drinking, and drinking with gambling; relaxing would mean drinking and gambling.'

Risk Factor 5: Effects of Shiftwork on Gambling

Employment in gambling venues is characterised by casual, shift, weekend and night work which can potentially impact on staff gambling behaviour. This is because working 'odd' hours can interfere with a worker's family, social and community life, with their leisure activities and with other obligations (Keith *et al.* 2001). This was probably the major risk factor identified by the counsellors, who noted that shiftworkers in general are over-represented amongst their clients. Five related sub-themes emerged.

Social isolation. Shiftwork can interfere with staff leisure time as 'the hours are different as they are working when others are playing and vice versa. …there is not much other social interaction available. They tend to cocoon themselves'. Some 'tend to go gambling during times when everyone else is at work, as there is no one else to hang out with'. Shiftwork can also interfere with the pursuit of other recreational activities and social

networks. As one counsellor explained, ‘a lot of people I see don’t have social support, don’t have good social life, they’re not getting what they need. And also with shift work they’re working Saturday or Friday night, a lot of times when other people would socialise.’ One client who attempted suicide ‘was living on the premises and eating on the premises and finding it difficult to distance himself from his work and he didn’t have a social outlet, apart from work.’

Need to find solitary leisure activities. Shiftwork means that employees often have to find solitary leisure activities. For some, playing gaming machines may be a particularly attractive activity, as it allows them to be around people without having to interact, something they spend many hours doing at work. As one counsellor explained, ‘pokies are one of the few activities that are socially acceptable on your own, and it gives you that false sense of feeling social.’ Another concurred that shiftwork ‘limits their leisure activities... And the one activity when you can still have people around you so you don’t feel so socially isolated is gambling.’

Lack of alternative leisure opportunities after work. When gaming venue staff finish work, it is often late at night when the only places open are other gaming venues, and so ‘they will go to the casino or to the club to play the pokies as a way of winding down after work’. One counsellor related an example of a croupier who would ‘finish work late at night, all hyped up…and where can you go to wind down and relax, and avoid all your problems?’ As another explained, ‘they are keyed up when they finish their shift, and they need somewhere to go, and what else is open? A lot of the time it is venues.’ Others noted that shiftwork also makes it difficult for staff to take up ‘sporting activities; if they wanted to take in any hobbies or have an interest, it is hard to get any time off.’

Shiftwork leads to stress. Shiftwork can also be stressful for workers. As one interviewee explained, ‘shiftwork relates to people’s body clock, how this enhances their vulnerability to stress. They are able to become unwell, become fatigued. This leaves them vulnerable to stress, and gambling is a way to respond to that. The only thing demanded of you is your money. It is easy to turn off.’ Another explained that ‘winding down after work and getting enough sleep and having a social life can be difficult. They can be at higher risk because of the hours that they work, when they knock off where do they go to wind down or socialise? If they go home, all the good TV is finished. And then, getting enough sleep…’.

Filling in time between shifts. Some counsellors also raised ‘the issue of split shifts - they have maybe three hours off each day, and travel is a factor’. Kitchen staff in particular often have a few hours off between meal periods, and so may turn to gambling to fill in that time between shifts, especially if going home for a few hours is not an easy option.

Risk Factor 6: Frequent Exposure To Gambling Marketing and Promotions

Many gambling venues engage in frequent and aggressive marketing activities, such as competitive loyalty programs, player rewards systems and promotional activities, often with high value prizes such as cars, boats and whitegoods. While targeted at patrons, employees are also constantly exposed to these stimuli to gamble. They are also more likely to be at the venue when winners are announced. However, there has been minimal research into the advertising and promotion of gambling products and services (Griffiths, 2003). Nevertheless, the Productivity Commission (1999) concluded that certain marketing

activities promoting gambling have the potential to undermine responsible gambling and informed decision-making by reinforcing inherently false beliefs. Gaming venues consider gambling promotions as worthwhile in encouraging patrons to gamble, so it is plausible that these promotions might also encourage gambling amongst employees frequently exposed to them. Four reasons emerged for this.

Acts as a trigger. It appears that hearing, seeing or being engaged in on-site gambling promotions can trigger gambling amongst some employees. As one interviewee explained, 'they work in a "trigger saturated" gambling environment…those messages about winning and inducements to play, real strong reinforcements that you can win, that it is social and fun…so really, there are an enormous amount of messages that say "this is great".' Another noted that 'the sounds and lights' and 'hearing it on the TV, the advertising' can 'send them off'.

Feeds erroneous thinking. Other counsellors noted that gambling marketing and promotions can feed erroneous beliefs around gambling, for staff as well as patrons. For example, one considered that 'employees constantly flooded by predominantly positive messages about gambling may be subject to fluctuations in their perceptions and thoughts about gambling, probably in a positive direction.' Another noted that 'the way gambling is promoted as gaming, a game, generally feeds into the fuzzy logic that people have around gambling. People apply a set of rules that don't fit to a game of chance.'

Worsens existing gambling problems. Others thought that gambling marketing and promotions would exacerbate any existing gambling problems amongst gaming venue staff as 'some promotions are fairly elaborate…so if gambling staff had a problem it would definitely influence their behaviour, make it worse.'

Caught up in excitement of promotions. Some staff may get caught up in the anticipation accompanying a gambling promotion, where 'there would be a lot of excitement around it, just waiting to see who is going to win.' For others, the lure of escalating jackpots can be enticing, especially for linked jackpots where staff can go to another venue to have a chance of winning it if they are not allowed to gamble in their own workplace. As one counsellor explained, 'the Money Train (a linked jackpot system) seems to have a big plug, because you'll have them going to places with those train machines, and they're watching the jackpot go up, and they go back because it has gone up the day before…. So that could be an influence on them from their workplace that they take somewhere else.'

Risk Factor 7: Reluctance to Expose Own Gambling Problems and Seek Help

A major theme that emerged from the counsellor interviews but was not anticipated from the preliminary work undertaken for this project was that gaming venue staff may be particularly reluctant to acknowledge a gambling problem and seek assistance to deal with it. Five sub-themes help explain why this may occur.

Fear of job loss. Where staff have gambling problems, they may, rightly or wrongly, fear losing their job if they acknowledge their problems by seeking help. Alternatively, some may be reticent to seek help if they fear that their gambling problems will thereby be discovered. As two quotes verify, 'there is some reluctance to divulge that you have a gambling problem because you might think that you may not have your job for very long',

and ‘in that culture they…are reluctant to approach a manager as there are real concerns that exist for the individual’s employment.’

Intolerance in the industry. Related to the previous point is that some counsellors considered that gambling problems amongst staff would be seen very negatively by employers, especially given the large amounts of cash typically held in gaming venues. As one noted, ‘that is what I am concerned about. Industry takes such a hard line and people won’t come forward and get help.’ To alleviate this, another suggested that ‘ultimately industry and the peak body need to come up with policies that reflect a bit more of a human (aspect)…to understand that we are all at risk.’

Difficulties of self-excluding. For some people, self-exclusion can be an effective deterrent to gambling. However, some interviewees felt that employees would be unlikely to self-exclude from the gambling areas of their own or other venues, as this could not be kept confidential from management and staff. To remedy this, one counsellor suggested that ‘the message needs to come from the venues to their staff that excluding yourself is actually seen as a positive step on your employment record, not a negative step.’

Limits work opportunities. Employees who might otherwise face up to their gambling problems may be deterred because of limited alternative employment opportunities if they want to avoid the gambling environment. Two specific examples of this were given. One interviewee explained about a client who managed a TAB outlet that ‘her options were very few…she would have to quit and find another job…after years and years and years of doing that…’ Another noted that ‘I had a chef…and I suggested he exclude himself from the casino, and he said…he can’t exclude himself because he just applied for a job there.’ Given the difficult situation these two clients were in, some interviewees considered there may be many other staff who would be reluctant to seek counselling for gambling problems because they lacked alternative work opportunities if they could not work around gambling.

Time to access help services. Employees who work irregular shifts or who are on a casual or on-call basis may find it impossible or very difficult to enter into a treatment program for gambling problems. As one counsellor explained, ‘they may feel more restrained from accessing help - number one, due to the practicability of work life, that is, time to access services.’

Apparent Protective Factors in the Workplace

Gambling problems are probably experienced by only a minority of gaming venue staff; thus it seems that the workplace may also provide some protective factors for them. The interviewees speculated on some of these, which can grouped into four major themes.

Protective Factor 1: Exposed to the Negatives and Realities of Gambling

It appears that being exposed to some of the negatives and realities of gambling in their workplace deters some staff from gambling. Five themes emerged from the data relating to this.

See gamblers with problems. Some venue staff are turned off gambling because they are exposed to customers with gambling problems, ‘seeing patrons get aggressive with the

machines, or they are seeing that patrons are losing'. They may become averse to gambling, 'having seen so many sad cases and tragic faces', which may lead them to consider that 'I've seen what it does to people, I'm not going there, I'm not going to be sucked in'.

Can trigger problem recognition. For some staff, seeing customers with gambling problems can trigger recognition of their own problems. For example, one counsellor said 'what I have heard quite regularly is that I see these people, and they're unhappy, and I know now I'm one of them.' Another recalled a client where 'her motivation to stop was by seeing some of her customers with problems. So it had a positive impact on her.'

Gambling seen as boring. Some counsellors speculated that staff would see gambling as boring. For example, one explained that 'in gaming venues the most obvious thing is that most people seem unhappy or bored. And it doesn't present as this exciting, enticing thing to be playing. …I imagine that it would turn them off. I can't imagine them walking into a venue and thinking this is a great place to be.'

Aware of the poor odds of winning. Some interviewees thought that staff would be deterred from gambling as they had better knowledge of the odds of winning and losing. One said 'I would have thought it could have a reverse effect. If anything, they're more familiar with the returns that the machines give, and people sit there for hours, chasing that elusive win', and another that 'it tends to go more the other way, where they see people losing, and are actually seeing the reality of it.'

More immune to advertising and promotions. When asked about the likely influence of gambling marketing and promotions, some interviewees outlined why they thought it would have little effect on gaming venue staff – that 'hopefully they would know when it was misleading, because they're actually working there', that 'it goes back to that desensitisation as well, where they don't notice the advertising the way patrons do', and that 'they have a bit of distance between them, because that marketing is not aimed at them in any way, shape or form'.

Protective Factor 2: Influence from Work to Not Gamble

Management or work colleagues may influence staff to not gamble or to gamble responsibly. Three factors are relevant.

Support/advice to stop gambling. Some counsellors related situations where their clients had received support from work colleagues to not gamble. This can occur between individuals where 'one person, who was working in the industry, his manager also had a problem, and they both talked to each other and supported each other.' Another counsellor gave a departmental example where 'a chef (and) his realisation of what was going on, sharing that with his kitchen hands, and making a pact in the end to support each other…the realisation that they were handing back their pay packets to the same organisation.'

Supportive work culture. In other workplaces, it seems that an anti-gambling culture can prevail, where 'they felt that their fellow workers may judge them badly…' Another related the situation in one venue where a manager 'felt really protective of his juniors; in the sense that he recognised that it is a really unnatural environment. They work long

hours, are exposed to not only the gambling but also the drinking…and I guess he wanted to shield people from that, especially the younger employees. He did that by telling them about what he thinks can happen if you do.'

No staff gambling in the workplace. A key protective factor identified by many counsellors was a house policy of no staff gambling in the workplace, which is adopted by most gaming venues. As one noted, 'a key issue is that employees can't gamble at their own venue', and another that 'I know one of the policies venues have to employ is to prohibit employees from gambling in their premises, so it depends on how much that is actually implemented and enforced.'

Protective Factor 3: Staff Training in Responsible Gambling

Undertaking training in responsible gambling may encourage staff to gamble responsibly themselves and so act as a protective factor. From the counsellor interviews, particularly those with counsellors who had a community education or liaison role, five main reasons for this were identified.

Raises awareness of problem gambling. Responsible gambling training can raise awareness amongst staff of problem gambling, as 'when you are able to expose people to information, it helps them reflect on their behaviour and makes them aware of problem gambling.' However, while some counsellors believed the training 'influences them in a positive way, and keeps them away from it (gambling)', others were more circumspect. As one commented 'yes, but not a significant impact. They will acknowledge it at some level, but they are desensitised. They are more likely to be influenced after coming to a crisis in their lives.'

Raises awareness of the effects of problem gambling. Training that focuses on the effects of problem gambling can act as a deterrent for staff. As one community education officer explained, 'when I present at venues, I relate to venue employees the long ranging negative consequences of excessive gambling. Many of the staff are quite shocked about some of the information I provide and possibly this influences how they view gambling and in turn their own gambling behaviour.'

Destigmatises problem gambling. Some counsellors felt their involvement with responsible gambling training helps to destigmatise gambling problems and breaks down barriers for any staff wanting to seek help. As one liaison officer noted, 'it creates a liaison between the venues and myself and my staff, and it would become a bit more obvious about what was happening amongst staff, and then the staff were a bit more willing to talk about the difficulties, and they were aware of their roles and responsibilities and needing to stay away from it.'

Raises awareness of ways gambling works. Training that explains the odds of winning and losing and how gambling works, such as the randomness of gaming machines, may also deter staff from gambling. For example, one counsellor commented that 'I suppose if, for example, they had some cognitive distortions around the way gaming machines work, if they were like the average Joe out there and believed that its due for a pay out, then any training that covered such areas would tend to help them.'

Can trigger help-seeking. Some counsellors related how responsible gambling training can trigger staff with gambling problems to seek help. For example, one employee had

approached a counsellor after that counsellor had provided venue-based training at his workplace. The counsellor commented that 'the fact that he'd attended the training may have made it a little bit easier for him to come in. He may not have come in at all, if he hadn't been at that training. He said to me, "I'm on the wrong side of the table. I just thought I shouldn't be receiving this training. I'm actually the person with the problem".' Another interviewee commented more generally that 'it has had an influence on their help seeking behaviour by raising their awareness of what problem gambling looks like…what does a problem gambler present with?'

However, the interviews also revealed that the protection afforded by responsible gambling training was limited as: not all staff are trained (e.g. 'there's been odd bits of training, but from what I can see, its more the managers, the gaming managers'); the training is not personalised or aimed at staff (e.g. 'it is too generic, they can think "it is the other people". Training is not designed to filter out problem gamblers, it doesn't explain what the EGM does psychologically to people'); and it would be ineffective if staff with gambling problems are not ready to change (e.g. 'it depends, if you've got someone who really wants to change, that could potentially have an influence on someone. If you get someone who is in a different stage of change, it just goes over their head; the knowledge doesn't influence them at all').

Protective Factor 4: Venue-Based Responsible Gambling Measures

When asked about the role of venue-based responsible gambling measures, some counsellors commented on the role of responsible gambling signage in protecting staff from gambling problems. This occurs in two main ways.

Signage raises awareness. Some interviewees felt that responsible gambling signage 'is a suggestive thing that goes in at some other level, like a subliminal message', and is perhaps particularly noticeable to staff when signage changes. As one interviewee explained, 'signage…has just recently changed, and a change like that will make it prominent to an employee, because they'll say to each other, "have you seen the new code?" and "what do you think about this?" So anything that actually flags it again - brings it to prominence - will have an impact, I think.'

Signage can trigger help-seeking. Signage may prompt some employees to seek help for gambling problems as 'when people get the problems, they do either ring the 1800 number or pick up the brochure. So it can be a trigger.' Other counsellors contended that this signage is not a protective factor, but may be useful after someone develops a gambling problem. For example, one explained that 'most certainly they have got help numbers from that signage, so it is useful to finding out where to get help, but it is not necessarily preventative. It tends to be after somebody has developed a problem rather than supporting people not to develop one in the first place.'

However, the interviews also revealed that the protective effects of responsible gambling measures are limited if: staff are in denial about personal gambling problems (e.g. 'I think it depends what state they are in. If they are in the denial state, they might say that, "gambling is not a problem for me, I'm a responsible gambler"'); if signage is not prominent (e.g. 'some of the venues are less enthusiastic about where they display the material. For example, you might go into a gaming venue and find it behind a door and behind a plant'); if staff are desensitised to signage (e.g. 'we know when people go into

venues, they're escaping reality, they don't pay a lot of attention to signs. And I think that would be the same for someone working in the industry, the impact would be pretty minimal'); and if responsible gambling is not taken seriously by management (e.g. the other thing they don't see is engagement by upper management or boards in responsible gambling stuff. …It seems to be left often to the floor manager of the day to deal with the responsible gambling stuff').

Venue Strategies to Encourage Responsible Gambling Amongst Staff

Numerous strategies were suggested by the interviewees whereby venues could better encourage responsible gambling and discourage gambling problems amongst their staff. These were grouped into four main themes.

Responsible Gambling Strategy 1: Prohibit gambling in the workplace

Many counsellors nominated prohibiting staff from gambling in their workplace as an important measure venues should take. Three related points were raised.

Lessens gambling problems. Gambling in their workplace can be convenient and offer a familiar, friendly environment for staff. Most interviewees were supportive of prohibiting staff from gambling where they work as 'it has been said to me by a couple of clients that it would have been better if they hadn't been able to gamble in their own venues' and 'I have had clients who have worked in venues where they can't gamble in the venue that they work in, telling me that that is a good thing.'

Should apply to all staff. While staff with gaming employee licences are prohibited by law from gambling at their place of employment, other staff can gamble there if their employer allows it. Given that the counsellors' clients included gaming venue staff in a range of non-gambling relate positions, it was not surprising that many interviewees advocated that all staff should be prohibited, that is 'not allowing any staff – cleaning staff or kitchen staff or any staff – to gamble in the workplace.'

Prevents staff from spending their wages at the venue. A further point raised was that employers have a 'responsibility is to ensure that their employees don't spend their pay packet at the venue.'

Responsible Gambling Strategy 2: Raise Staff Awareness of and Access to Counselling

Many counsellors identified raising staff awareness of and access to counselling as an important responsible gambling strategy. This could occur in three ways.

Information on local counselling services. Some counsellors raised the importance of staff being aware of local counselling services they could access. As one noted, 'I would hope that venues would have access to their nearest counselling organisation, so that staff would know where they could go to get help and be treated confidentially, and that that was normalised and they would feel okay.'

Liaison with local counselling services. Some counsellors also saw potential benefits in closer liaison between venues and local counselling services. As one explained, 'when they

do have staff meetings, if they were to invite someone like us along to put a face to the service…so having more visits to where staff gather would be beneficial.'

Venue based counselling/ assistance. Other interviewees felt that venues could facilitate counselling for staff, for example, 'something within their employee assistance program, where people could nominate to go and see a counsellor' or 'having someone that they can possibly talk to at the venue'.

Responsible Gambling Strategy 3: More Approachable and Flexible Employers

As noted earlier, an unanticipated risk factor the counsellors identified was reluctance of staff to expose a gambling problem and to seek help. They were then able to identify three strategies to help overcome this reluctance.

Remove fear of job loss. The interviewees thought that 'there needs to be a resolution found' whereby venues 'don't create fear of losing their job' if staff disclose a gambling problem. There was concern that instead 'what is given to them is threats that if you do develop a gambling problem, then you can kiss your job goodbye. There is very low tolerance for that sort of thing.' This then 'puts a distance between getting any information or help if they thought they were starting to have a problem.'

Provide support for staff with gambling problems. The interviewees also felt that venues should be supportive of staff with gambling problems. As one explained, 'it is really important for the managers to express to their staff that there will be support available to anyone who may develop problem gambling behaviour. This could be seen as an early intervention strategy and venue staff may feel confident to disclose this information to one of the managers and expect to be understood and supported in providing some possible solutions in their work environment.' Even if staff cannot gamble on the work premises, venues should send 'some sort of strong message that, if you develop a problem off our premises, we'll still see that as something that we have a commitment to. What you do there is force some off the premises and the problem elsewhere.'

Provide alternative jobs in the venue. To help employees deal with gambling problems, some counsellors suggested that venues 'could do shift rotation, so that people had different jobs to do.' Another counsellor noted that 'some clients have said that if they could move around into other positions within the industry, such as the food service area. But they were too scared to say that.' Another contended that 'I would like to see a policy where this automatic dismissal stuff should not be part of it. I have heard of somewhere where they moved people out of that area, just moved them into another section. I guess I would just like to see things dealt with at a more human level.'

Responsible Gambling Strategy 4: Staff Training and Education about Gambling

The interviewees also highlighted the potential value of staff education and training about gambling and general wellbeing. Five areas were identified that such education and training could address.

Provide information on risks for staff. As some counsellors commented, 'the education around the risks for them as staff is an area that needs to be encouraged more', because 'general education and awareness is critical if you are going to be working in that environment, so you need to give your staff some strategies and some awareness, and currently none of that is given.' Other interviewees suggested that venues could do 'some of the things they do for clients - keeping brochures in their staff room', 'inform them about the odds', 'get people who have had problems, who have worked in the industry to talk about it' and have 'a mentoring process'.

All staff trained in responsible gambling. As noted earlier, not all venue staff are trained in responsible gambling, yet this is a strategy advocated by many counsellors, whereby **'**all staff could be sent to training. Management need to be more active. Particularly with policy and practice, staff could become more aware of and implement it. There could be general information sessions as to the signs and symptoms (of gambling problems). This could help them make more informed decisions.'

More relevant responsible gambling training. Other counsellors advocated more relevant responsible gambling training for staff which includes 'how it can affect a lot of people who work in this area as well – normalising it to an extent', telling 'people about the end result - especially effects on families and others - of problem gambling behaviour', and conveying an understanding of 'the difference between responsible gambling and problem gambling, and understanding the indicators'.

Promote a stronger culture of responsible gambling. Some interviewees felt that venue strategies to protect staff should be underpinned by a stronger culture of responsible gambling with 'management to take responsible gambling more seriously – top down engagement.' Another explained that 'over time we build on that culture in this population of people so they understand what problem gambling means to their patrons and to us.'

Encourage staff wellbeing. A final strategy suggested was for venues to encourage alternative leisure activities to promote staff wellbeing. This could include 'promotion of non-venue based social activities' such as 'a community place where they could meet…or gym membership as part of their remuneration, so that they had something that was acceptable to them to do when they've finished their shift, so that they're not just out the door in the middle of the night when they've finished their shift.'

Conclusion

While exploratory in nature, the research reported in this paper is able to reach a number of conclusions. First, staff who work in gaming venues appear an at-risk group for developing gambling problems, drawing on the experience and professional opinions of most gambling counsellors in Queensland. Second, this risk for some staff stems from a variety of factors relating to working in a gambling environment. Third, numerous workplace factors also protect some staff by deterring them from gambling, by minimising harmful behaviours and by improving informed consent. Finally, there are strategies venues can implement to better encourage responsible gambling and discourage the development of gambling problems amongst their staff.

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