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THE EFFICACY OF RESPONSIBLE GAMBLING MEASURES IN NSW CLUBS: THE GAMBLERS' PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract:
In 2000, the New South Wales Government legislated for gambling venues, including registered clubs, to implement certain responsible gambling measures. Many clubs also have introduced some voluntary strategies, including those contained in the Clubsafe program developed by Clubs NSW. However, no evidence exists that such measures are effective in minimising harm and protecting consumers in gambling. This paper addresses this gap in knowledge. Members from ten large Sydney clubs were surveyed to assess the level of awareness of their clubs' responsible gambling measures, how adequate they considered these measures to be, and whether these measures had changed their gambling behaviour in terms of frequency, expenditure and gambling session length. Comparisons are drawn between 'problem' and 'recreational' gamblers to inform a more grounded approach to responsible conduct of gambling, one that is better targeted at those most at risk of gambling-related harm.

Keywords:
responsible gambling, gambling signage, self-exclusion

Introduction

This paper first provides a brief overview of the New South Wales (NSW) registered clubs industry, its role in machine gambling provision, and its responsible gambling program (ClubSafe). Details of the primary research which informs this paper are then provided, including the research aims, methodology and key results. The paper concludes with several points aimed at informing future developments in responsible gambling.

Background on the NSW Registered Clubs Industry

Registered clubs are major providers of machine gambling in Australia, particularly in the State of NSW, which has approximately 1,400 registered clubs. NSW registered clubs have been legally allowed to operate gaming machines since 1956. Since then, there has been considerable growth in both the number of machines and the number of clubs licensed to operate them. NSW clubs now collectively operate approximately 75,000 gaming machines, which represent about 8% of all 'high intensity' gaming machines worldwide, about 40 percent of all gaming machines in Australia and 74 percent of gaming machines in NSW. They attract some 92 percent of NSW gaming machine turnover and gross profit outside the State's one casino (Productivity Commission, 1999). Most NSW clubs also operate keno, bingo and TAB facilities, but machine gaming is both the major type of gambling offered and their major revenue earner. About 60 percent of collective NSW club income is derived from gaming machines (Productivity Commission, 1999).

The Development of Responsible Gambling Measures in NSW Clubs

As major providers of machine gambling, NSW clubs have been faced with pressure to introduce and implement a variety of responsible gambling measures. Prior to 1998, there very few clubs which had introduced such measures (Hing, 2000). However, a number of events converged which culminated in legislation requiring the implementation of responsible gambling measures in NSW. These events included the following:

The industry association for NSW registered clubs, Clubs NSW, had commenced the development of a self-regulated responsible gambling policy and program for the industry. However, a trial of this voluntary program resulted in very low implementation rates and exposed the inherent weaknesses of self-regulation (Australian Institute for Gambling Research, 1998).

The first NSW Inquiry into gambling in 1998 (IPART, 1998) highlighted issues such as public interest, harm minimisation, consumer protection, fair trading and community benefits in gambling, and advocated for the NSW Government to legislate for core minimum standards in responsible gambling.

The Productivity Commission inquiry (1999), Australia's first and only national inquiry into gambling, also provided support for calls for more proactive responsible gambling measures, shifting the onus of responsibility onto gambling operators to improve harm minimisation and consumer protection measures at the venue level, and onto governments to regulate for these measures.

These developments culminated in the passage of the Gambling Legislation Amendment (Responsible Gambling) Act 1999 NSW. The Act's express purpose was 'to amend certain Acts to minimise the harm associated with the misuse and abuse of gambling activities (and) to promote the responsible conduct of gambling activities'. It established in a legislative framework certain obligations of gambling operators in responsible management of gambling. This development represented the first whole of industry and, arguably, the most comprehensive legislated approach to responsible conduct of gambling of any jurisdiction in Australia (Hing, 2000). Specific requirements for registered clubs were detailed in the Registered Clubs Amendment (Responsible Gambling) Act 2000 NSW and associated Regulations. In summary the regulations required NSW clubs to:

- provide information to patrons on counselling services, the use and operation of gaming machines, the chances of winning and the problems caused from excessive gambling;
- limit the cashing of cheques;
- place limitations on the payment of prizes by cash;
- locate cash dispensing facilities away from poker machine areas;
- place limitations on gambling-related advertising;
- prohibit the offering of inducements to gamble;
- require the secretary and certain employees to undertake an approved training course in the responsible conduct of gambling;
- advise the minimum requirement for self-exclusion schemes;
- make other miscellaneous controls.

The ClubSafe Program

The regulatory requirements of NSW clubs have been operationalised principally through the ClubSafe program developed by Clubs NSW. The ClubSafe program includes both mandatory and voluntary measures in responsible gambling. It was launched on 1 May 2000, and states a commitment to:

- Providing gambling services and practices that conform to all applicable Acts and Regulations;
- Promoting responsible gambling practices that conform to local community standards and expectations;
- Establishing a patron complaint resolution process;
- Implementing policies to encourage responsible practices in advertising and promotions relating to gambling and ensure compliance with relevant legislation;
- Developing a policy that ensures all legislative requirement relating to cheque cashing, payment of winnings and financial transactions are implemented and encourages patrons to develop responsible practices in the use of finances for gambling purposes;
- Introducing procedures for handling personal information relating to gambling patrons in a club to protect their rights of privacy;
- Establishing a pleasant and safe gambling environment;
- Informing and training staff on legislative requirements, harm minimisation issues, the risks of not complying with legislative requirements or not adopting and practicing harm minimisation strategies and taking appropriate steps to promote patron and employee care;
- Encouraging patrons to take responsibility for their gambling activity through an effective self-exclusion or other mechanisms;
- Informing patrons and staff of the club's responsible gambling policy and program, the nature of gambling products and the availability of support services for problem gamblers; and
- Developing links between the club and relevant community organisations that will provide support and advice for problem gamblers and their families.

To meet these guidelines and the legislated requirements, registered clubs in NSW have introduced a range of measures, such as displaying signage about problem gambling and responsible gambling, providing player information about gambling products and how they work, removing ATMs and EFTPOS facilities from gambling areas, offering self-exclusion programs, restricting the advertising of gambling, cheque payment of large prizes and restrictions on cashing cheques for gambling purposes. In all, the ClubSafe training manual outlines 33 responsible gambling measures.

Evaluation of Responsible Gambling Measure

At this time, there appears to be no evidence that the responsible gambling measures in the ClubSafe program, or indeed those in similar responsible gambling programs, are effective in minimising harm and protecting consumers in gambling. For example, an audit of mandatory and voluntary responsible gambling programs across the various gambling sectors in all Australian jurisdictions (Hing, Dickerson and Mackellar, 2001) found no evidence to support the efficacy of responsible gambling measures then in place. Similarly, the Productivity Commission (1999:23.5) identified 'the effectiveness of harm minimisation programs' in gambling as a specific information gap. It recommended that

'regulations intending to lower the harms from gambling should be trialed, take a risk management approach and collect evidence of their effectiveness' (1999:16.1). It advocated an 'evidence-based approach' as the basis for retaining or discarding such measures (1999:16.3). Given the difficulty in gathering evidence on the likely effectiveness of responsible gambling strategies prior to their introduction, the Commission contended that the effectiveness of any introduced measures should be subject to detailed evaluation (1999:16.87).

However, to the author's knowledge, no evaluation of the effectiveness of existing responsible gambling measures in NSW has previously been conducted. Further, basically no evaluation has been conducted of the effectiveness of similar responsible gambling strategies in other jurisdictions. In fact, in summarising key issues arising from research into harm minimisation strategies in gambling in Europe, Canada and the United States, Blaszcynski (2001) noted that 'there is a significant absence of credible research data on the effectiveness of specific interventions to guide and inform policy decision-making' and that 'there is virtually no evidence to … confirm their effectiveness'.

Given this absence of an evidence-based approach to responsible management of gambling, the responsible gambling measures in NSW clubs were necessarily developed using a 'top down' approach, that is, initiated by governments and key stakeholders in the industry, rather than via a 'bottom up' process starting from the gambler base most at risk of harmful impacts (Hing, Dickerson and Mackellar, 2001). Thus, an evaluation is needed if the efficacy, or otherwise, of these measures is to be demonstrated.

Designing such an evaluation requires consideration of which aspects of the responsible gambling program are to be evaluated. Three types of evaluation are typically used for health programs – evaluation of how effectively the program has been implemented (process evaluation), evaluation of the effectiveness of the program in changing the target group's behaviour in the desired way (impact evaluation), and evaluation of the effectiveness of the program in reducing the problem it aims to address (outcome evaluation) (Hawe, Degeling and Hall, 1990, p.103). The study summarised in this paper focused on only one of these types of evaluation – impact evaluation – that is, the effectiveness of the program in changing the target group's behaviour in the desired way.

A second consideration in this type of research is to decide whose views will be sought as the basis for evaluating the program. In this study, it was decided that, because the target group for responsible gambling measures are the gamblers themselves, the views of club patrons would provide one appropriate set of data by which the program could be evaluated. Therefore, this study aimed to assess the efficacy of the clubs' responsible gambling strategies from a patron perspective.

While this study suffers from certain limitations, it helps to address a gap in research and inform a more grounded approach to responsible conduct of gambling, one that is informed by the target group for responsible gambling measures.

Research Aims and Objective

The specific aim of the study was to assess club members' awareness, perceived adequacy and perceived effectiveness of responsible gambling strategies in Sydney clubs, following the enactment of the responsible gambling legislation. Two research objectives were addressed:

- to assess the perceived efficacy of current responsible gambling strategies in Sydney clubs by measuring the level of awareness of club patrons of their club's responsible gambling strategies (awareness), whether club members think their club's responsible gambling strategies are adequate in minimising harm and protecting consumers in gambling (perceived adequacy), and whether club members consider that their club's responsible gambling strategies have changed their gambling behaviour and in what ways (perceived effectiveness); and,
- to assess the perceived efficacy of current responsible gambling strategies in Sydney clubs for different subsets of gamblers, including 'at-risk' and 'recreational' gamblers.

Method

The research focused on ten clubs located in Sydney. All participating clubs had gaming machines (totalling 3,828 machines), TAB and keno facilities. The sample included clubs of different types (RSL, workers, leagues, community), with differing membership bases and located in areas of Sydney with varying socio-economic profiles. While this sample was not representative of the population of NSW registered clubs, it was anticipated that, by choosing a sample of clubs that varied by type, size, location and membership profile, the results would not be overly biased towards clubs with particular characteristics. The selection of the club sample was also determined by the willingness of the clubs to participate in the research.

A survey questionnaire was deemed the most appropriate instrument to collect the necessary data from sufficient club members to allow rigorous analysis. Two surveys were conducted:

Mail survey. The survey questionnaire was mailed to 6,000 members from four Sydney clubs, yielding 706 usable responses. A purposeful stratified sampling technique was used to gather data from club members with differing levels of gambling involvement. Because the proportions of 'at-risk' and 'problem' gamblers among the population of club members were likely to be small (based on previous prevalence studies of various populations), the sampling technique aimed to capture higher numbers of these gamblers than would likely have resulted from a random sampling technique. Thus, the sample comprised the top 500, middle 500 and bottom 500 people on the player tracking system of each participating club according to gambling expenditure in the previous 12 months.

On-site survey. A second survey, conducted on-site in six Sydney clubs, yielded 248 responses, using convenience sampling. These surveys were conducted over two days in each of the six clubs, and were completed by patrons in the club foyer as they entered or left the club.

The survey instrument contained six main sections:

1. Characteristics of the respondents relating to their frequency of gambling on poker machines, TAB and keno, their most preferred type of club gambling, their age and sex.
2. Respondents' awareness of their club's responsible gambling practices. These comprised the 33 responsible gambling measures identified in the ClubSafe Responsible Conduct of Gambling Participants Manual (Casino Community Benefit

Fund, 2000), which can be logically grouped into six categories – responsible gambling signage and information, the gambling environment, financial transactions, restrictions on who can gambling, self-exclusion, and responsible advertising and promotions.

3. Respondents' opinions on the adequacy of their club's responsible gambling practices. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement that responsible gambling is more likely to occur when a club implements responsible gambling measures relating to 13 broad areas into which the 33 ClubSafe measures can be grouped - signage, player information, counselling services, reality checks, opening hours, cheque cashing, credit and cash advances, location of ATM and EFTPOS, payment of winning, minors and intoxicated persons, self-exclusion, staff training, and gambling advertising and promotions.
4. Respondents' opinions on the effectiveness of their club's responsible gambling practices, in terms of whether they have affected the respondent's own gambling behaviour. Respondents were asked the extent to which responsible gambling practices in their club have affected the way they think about their gambling, the way they feel about their gambling, how often they gamble, how long they usually gamble for and how much they usually spend on gambling.
5. The Harm to Self Scale of the Victorian Gambling Screen (VGS) (Victorian Casino and Gaming Authority, 2001) to identify 'problem', 'borderline problem' and 'non-problem' gamblers among the respondents.
6. Additional comments about responsible gambling, invited on the back page of the survey instrument.

The quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics and chi-square analyses to identify any significant differences among problem, borderline problem and non-problem gamblers who participate in poker machine, TAB, and keno gambling. Qualitative data comprised the additional comments provided by about 40 percent of respondents and which totalled over 25,000 words. These were analysed by coding the comments into themes and sub-themes.

Results

Key Characteristics of Respondent

The key characteristics of respondents can be summarised as follows:

A little over half (53%) were found to gamble weekly or more often on at least one of the three types of gambling (poker machines, TAB, keno), over one-third were found to be irregular gamblers (37%), while approximately 10% hardly ever or never gamble on them. Poker machine playing is by far the most frequent type of gambling among the respondents. Almost half (46%) reported that they gamble at least weekly on poker machines, compared to 15% who engage in TAB gambling at least weekly, and 8% who play keno at least weekly.

Approximately three-quarters of respondents (73%) nominated poker machines as their most preferred type of gambling. About 20% of regular poker machine players are also regular TAB gamblers and about 13% are also regular keno players.

Nearly half (45.7%) the respondents reported some level of problem gambling, as measured by the Harm to Self Scale of the Victorian Gambling Screen. 19.5% of

respondents were classified as problem gamblers. For both the mail and on-site surveys, these people were more likely to be regular poker machine players. A further 26.2% were classified as borderline problem gamblers. For both the mail and on-site surveys, these people were more likely to be regular poker machine players. 54.3% of respondents were classified as non-problem gamblers.

Awareness and Perceived Adequacy of Responsible Gambling Measures

Key results relating to awareness and perceived adequacy of the responsible gambling measures are presented in six sections, relating to signage and information, the gambling environment, financial transactions, restrictions on who can gamble, self-exclusion, and advertising and promotions.

Responsible Gambling Signage and Information

The quantitative results revealed a high level of recognition among respondents of the clubs' responsible gambling signage and information. Signs advising patrons of the risks of gambling had been noticed by 86% of respondents, with over 70% also noticing signage about the club's responsible gambling house policy, G-Line counselling services, and problem gambling. Over 67% of respondents had noticed signs about the chances of winning a major poker machine prize. However, half or less of the respondents had seen player information brochures or signs about local counselling services.

However, while awareness of responsible gambling signage and information was reasonably high, respondents were less convinced that its provision encourages responsible gambling. When rated on its adequacy, the mean score for questions relating to signage and information was 3.5 (where 5 = strongly agree and 1 = strongly disagree), the lowest adequacy scores for any of the 13 responsible gambling target areas. That is, of all the areas where clubs have introduced responsible gambling measures, signage and information were perceived to be the least likely to encourage responsible gambling.

This view was also supported by many additional comments. While some respondents (9) generally praised the responsible gambling signage in venues, seeing it as a positive move, others (30) believed it was ineffective, largely because people ignore signs, especially those who may be in denial about their gambling problems. Others criticised the signs for being non-confrontational, too familiar and easily ignored. Others saw problem gambling as an addiction, such that no amount of signage would make a difference. Some respondents (13) offered specific ways in which signs and information could be improved – placing large warning signs on each machine, responsible gambling information to accompany membership renewals, free responsible gambling seminars in clubs, case studies of problem gambling displayed in venues and their newsletters, multi-lingual signs, more prominent and attention-grabbing signs, and having brochures on display instead of patrons having to ask for them. Some advocated more signage, while others advocated fewer but more effective signs. Others were critical that any impact of signs was overshadowed by the large and enticing jackpot signs, illuminated machines and flashing lights that characterise gaming rooms.

The Gambling Environment

In terms of responsible gambling measures relating to the gambling environment, few respondents were able to recognise any measures their club had implemented to help

people keep track of the time when playing poker machines, either through being able to see a clock (37%) or being able to see out of a window (13%). Furthermore, 38% of respondents considered the lighting dim in poker machine areas, while up to one-third agreed they could play poker machines all day and all night at their club if they wanted to (that is, there are no mechanisms to enforce breaks in play). These responses suggest that the clubs are not perceived as being particularly proactive in providing a gambling environment that encourages responsible gambling.

However, when the adequacy scores were computed, it is clear that, with mean scores of 3.7, the respondents on average agreed that responsible gambling is more likely to occur when a club's gambling areas have clocks and natural lighting to make people aware of the passage of time, and when a club shuts down gambling facilities for at least a few hours each day.

These results were supported by the qualitative data. Numerous comments (42) were made about features of the gambling environment that respondents suggested could be improved to better facilitate responsible gambling. Some wanted more visible clocks (6), while others suggested brighter lighting (7) and windows so people are more aware of the passage of time while gambling (2). Some respondents wanted better segregation of gambling areas in venues (8), putting gaming machines 'out of sight, so out of mind' so they are not as visible and enticing. Others seemed to want better segregation so they could escape the sights and sounds of poker machines while visiting the club. Some respondents (12) advocated for clubs to offer a broader range of facilities and services as alternatives to gambling, with many criticising clubs for being little more than gambling dens. Suggestions included more entertainment, lounge facilities, recreational facilities, and family activities. Further, some respondents (18) advocated shorter opening hours for gambling venues. Some advocated shutting down the venues or their gambling facilities at certain intervals during the day, to force gamblers to take a break and think about their actions. Others saw shorter opening hours as a way to reduce gambling expenditure and therefore the financial problems experienced by some gamblers. They suggested this would also encourage gamblers to spend more time on family, work and other responsibilities.

Financial Transaction

The quantitative data revealed low awareness of the financial transactions policies implemented in clubs to encourage responsible gambling. Over one-half of respondents were unsure about whether their club would cash personal cheques, cheques for over $200 or multiple cheques for one person. Nearly one-half of respondents were also unsure whether the club would extend them credit with which to gamble and approximately two-fifths were unsure whether they could be paid totally in cash for large gambling prizes. Such results would be expected if these respondents had never tried to access cash in these ways at their club. Nevertheless, the clubs do not appear to be communicating these policies to patrons particularly well. Furthermore, nearly half the respondents noted that their club has an ATM in its gambling areas, and about one-fifth noted the presence of EFTPOS facilities there. Two-thirds of respondents believed that the placement of these facilities does not encourage responsible gambling. This indicates little confidence in the placement of cash facilities outside of poker machine rooms as an effective responsible gambling measure.

Nevertheless, the responsible gambling measures relating to access to cash were strongly supported by the survey respondents. The mean adequacy scores was approximately 4.2 for

not extending credit or cash advances for gambling, 3.9 for paying big wins by cheque, 3.8 for not cashing cheques for more than $200, and 3.7 for placing ATMs and EFTPOS facilities away from gambling areas.

In the qualitative data, there were several aspects of financial transactions that drew criticisms from respondents and/or suggestions for improvements. Some comments (7) were critical of current cheque-cashing policies in clubs, with most of these advocating an outright ban. Others (28) were critical of their club's procedures for issuing payouts, prizes and change. Some (5) noted that the long queues and understaffing at change counters encouraged people to put larger notes into poker machines instead of waiting. Others noted their club seems to have a policy of providing many $1 coins in the change given for other purchases, presumably to encourage poker machine play. Other respondents (19) were critical of delays in getting machine payouts from venue attendants (up to half an hour) to redeem credits and for jackpots. This, they said, encouraged people to play off remaining credits or to play the machine next to them while waiting. This problem has been largely exacerbated by the removal of coin dispensing facilities on many machines, which many respondents claimed the clubs now seem to favour. A few respondents (4) advocated lower thresholds for cheque payment of winnings. Additionally, many comments (38) were made about the placement of ATMs and EFTPOS facilities in clubs. Many (22) advocated removing ATM and EFTPOS facilities from gambling venues, considering them obvious facilitators of over-spending on gambling. Some (5) felt they were too close to gambling areas, while others (11) suggested limiting their use in various ways. These included limiting the amount of cash that could be withdrawn, lowering the minimum withdrawal amount, limiting the number of withdrawals per day, and better controls by banks so daily withdrawal limits could not be exceeded.

Restrictions on Who Can Gamble

According to the quantitative results, there has not been full compliance by the clubs with legislation restricting minors from entering gambling areas, with 10% of respondents noting they had seen minors in the gambling areas of their club. Furthermore, 14% of respondents noted that, even if someone has been refused alcohol service due to intoxication, this does not always preclude them from gambling in the club. This flexibility in allowing intoxicated people to gamble was also noted by some respondents (5) in their additional comments on the survey. Overall, the quantitative results show that there is high awareness of restrictions on minors, but very low awareness of restrictions on intoxicated people gambling as responsible gambling measures.

However, preventing minors and intoxicated persons from gambling was rated the highest in the adequacy measure, with a mean score of 4.3. That is, the respondents agreed quite strongly that this measure is one that encourages responsible gambling.

Self-Exclusion

Awareness of self-exclusion programs in the clubs was low, with only about one-quarter of respondents having seen related signs in their club and approximately one-third reporting that they know what self-exclusion is. However, self-exclusion was ranked seventh out of 13 in the adequacy measure, with a mean score of 3.8. That is, the respondents generally agreed that responsible gambling is more likely to happen when a club provides a self-exclusion program.

This low awareness of self-exclusion programs was reflected in the additional comments, where only four people provided related comments. Of these, one wanted people to be able to have a family member excluded for gambling problems, one wanted the self-exclusion noted on the person's driver's license so they could not cash cheques or pawn goods, while another noted that self-exclusion 'only works if you put your card in the machine'.

Responsible Advertising and Promotion

According to the quantitative results, just over three-quarters of respondents had not seen any advertising by their club which they considered irresponsible. The majority were also satisfied that their club's advertising and promotions did not focus solely on gambling, and around one-half that reward points could be earned by using a range of the club's facilities and services, not just by gambling. However, only about one-third of respondents could nominate unaided how their club's advertising encouraged responsible gambling or discouraged problem gambling, while this figure was around 17% for their club's promotions. These results suggest that, while most respondents consider their club's advertising to be responsible, they do not see this advertising, nor club promotions, as particularly proactive in encouraging responsible gambling.

Nevertheless, the respondents do consider that responsible gambling is more likely to happen when a club conducts its gambling advertising and promotions in a responsible manner. The mean score on the adequacy measure was 3.8 and ranked fifth of all 13 practice areas.

The perceived importance of responsible advertising and promotions in encouraging responsible gambling was reflected in the qualitative data, where numerous respondents (18) were critical of club promotions in particular. Half of these noted that winning promotions required people to be on the premises when the prize was announced, thus encouraging people to stay for longer and gamble more. The other half was critical that the style of promotions used offered significant inducements to gamble. Many saw such promotions as very much against the spirit of responsible gambling, even though their club had implemented other responsible gambling practices.

Ranking of Perceived Adequacy of Responsible Gambling Measures

There was strong agreement that the clubs could contribute to responsible gambling by implementing their current responsible gambling measures. In descending order of agreement, the respondents indicated that responsible gambling is more likely to occur when a club prevents minors and intoxicated persons from gambling, does not extend credit or cash advances for gambling, pays all big wins by cheque instead of cash, has staff trained in responsible gambling practices, conducts its gambling advertising and promotions in a responsible manner, does not cash cheques for more than $200, provides a self-exclusion program, shuts down gambling facilities for at least a few hours each day, ensures its gambling areas have clocks and natural lighting to make people aware of the passage of time, and places its ATMs and EFTPOS facilities away from gambling areas. However, there was lower level of agreement that responsible gambling is more likely to occur when a club provides information about odds of winning and game rules, displays signs and notices about problem gambling and responsible gambling, and displays contact details of gambling counselling services.

Perceived Effectiveness of Responsible Gambling Measure

The survey also aimed to measure the perceived effectiveness of the clubs' responsible gambling measures, by asking the respondents whether these measures have changed certain aspects of their gambling. The quantitative results indicate that the clubs' responsible gambling practices have had little effect on the way the vast majority of respondents think about their gambling, feel about their gambling, how often they gamble, how long they gamble for and how much they spend:

- 44% of respondents reported that the responsible gambling measures in the clubs have been effective in changing how they think about their gambling;
- 12% of respondents reported that the responsible gambling measures in the clubs have been effective in changing how they feel about their gambling, by making it less enjoyable;
- 18% of respondents reported that the responsible gambling measures in the clubs have been effective in reducing how often they usually gamble;
- 17% of respondents reported that the responsible gambling measures in the clubs have been effective in reducing the length of time they usually gamble for; and
- 19% of respondents reported that the responsible gambling measures in the clubs have been effective in reducing how much they usually spend when gambling.

However, while the above results indicate that the clubs' responsible gambling measures have had some impacts, the percentages of respondents who have changed the way they feel about their gambling and who have changed their frequency, session length and expenditure on gambling are much lower than the 45.7% of respondents classified as borderline problem or problem gamblers on the VGS Harm to Self Scale. Thus, the clubs' responsible gambling practices cannot be considered as being very effective for most problem gamblers or for most of those who are at risk.

This perceived lack of effectiveness of the clubs' responsible gambling measures was also borne out in the qualitative data. While numerous suggestions were made to improve practices and procedures within the current scope of measures, as discussed previously, the additional comments also advocated numerous measures which fell outside this scope. As such, they represent ways in which respondents considered that additional measures could enhance current efforts. Two areas were prominent here that have not been previously discussed – poker machine design and numbers of poker machines.

Certain aspects of poker machine design attracted numerous criticisms and suggestions (74), including:

- Criticisms of the fast rate of play (5).
- Better information needed on the odds of winning (11).
- Change the odds of winning (3).
- Criticism of note acceptors (6).
- Reduce the maximum bet (9).
- Reduce the number of betting lines (4).
- Advocate time limits on machines (7).
- Criticisms of large (linked) jackpots (6).
- Criticisms of the win rate on machines (13).
- Advocacy of cashless gaming (1).
- Need for warnings and more information displayed on machines (7).

- Reduce music and noise of machines (2).

Some respondents (15) criticised the large number of poker machines in operation. Of these, some (10) advocated a large reduction in machine numbers as a responsible gambling measure, while others (5) wanted them banned altogether.

Differences Among Problem, Borderline Problem and Non-Problem Gambler

In terms of awareness and perceived adequacy of responsible gambing practices: problem and borderline problem gamblers were more aware of some responsible gambling measures than non-problem gamblers, specifically the club's policies prohibiting the provision of credit for gambling, that personal cheques cannot be cashed at the club, and that large poker machine winnings cannot be paid all in cash.
However, they were also more likely to have seen advertising or promotions by their club that they considered irresponsible.

No differences were found in the perceived adequacy of responsible gambling measures when compared by problem gambling category.

The following significant differences (where significance levels were set at $p \leq 0.001$) among problem, borderline problem and non-problem gamblers in the mail survey were evident in their responses to the five questions about the effectiveness of their club's responsible gambling measures. However, no significant differences were found among participants in the on-site survey, although, for each of the five variables below, higher proportions of problem and borderline problem gamblers were 'positively' affected by the responsible gambling measures than were non-problem gamblers:

They way people think about their gambling. The responsible gambling practices were reported to have changed the way 53.7% of problem gamblers and 52.1% of borderline problem gamblers think about their gambling, compared to 33.7% of non-problem gamblers.

Feelings about gambling. The responsible gambling practices were reported to have changed the way 23.2% of problem gamblers feel about their gambling by making it less enjoyable to some extent. This has also been the case for 15.9% of borderline problem gamblers and 5.3% of non-problem gamblers.

Frequency of gambling. The responsible gambling practices were reported to have influenced 26.2% of problem gamblers and 26.3% of borderline problem gamblers to gamble less often. This has also been the case for 8.6% of non-problem gamblers.

Length of gambling session. The responsible gambling practices were reported to have influenced 23.1% of problem gamblers and 26.8% of borderline problem gamblers to gamble for a shorter time. This has also occurred for 9.9% of non-problem gamblers.

Gambling expenditure. The responsible gambling practices were reported to have influenced 24.2% of problem gamblers and 28.4% of borderline problem gamblers to spend less when they gamble. This has also been the case for 12.1% of non-problem gamblers.

From these results, it is apparent that the existing responsible gambling measures in the clubs have had some impact on problem and borderline problem gamblers, and to a much lesser extent on non-problem gamblers. Thus, the measures appear to target the appropriate population, while having a minor impact on the non-target population. However, the extent of this impact is limited. While effective in encouraging over half of the target group to think about their gambling, these thoughts have not prompted a change in gambling frequency, session length and usual expenditure for more than about a quarter of those experiencing gambling problems.

Discussion

Based on the results of this study (and additional research experience), the following observations are offered to inform future developments in responsible gambling.

One of the clearest indicators of the limited effectiveness of current responsible gambling measures in NSW clubs is the high incidence of gambling problems amongst the respondents in this study. While non-random sampling methods were used and so the problem gambling rates found in this study may not be representative of the population, it is still of great concern that 40.7% of patrons who happened to be on club premises and agreed to participate in the on-site survey when conducted had experienced problems with their gambling in the previous 12 months, as had 47.4% of the mail survey respondents.
The self-reported data on changes in gambling behaviour prompted by existing responsible gambling measures are a further indicator of their limited effectiveness. While reasonably successful in targeting the appropriate population (of problem and at-risk gamblers), the measures have not been effective in changing key aspects of gambling behaviour (frequency, session length and expenditure) for most of the target group in the study.

The data also indicate a lack of community confidence in these current measures. The qualitative data in particular reflect that there remains quite some scepticism about whether the clubs are truly embracing responsible gambling and practising effective patron care. While many responsible gambling measures have been implemented, other venue practices are perceived as very much against the spirit of responsible gambling (e.g. promotions, ATMs very close to gaming machine areas, gambling room features that discourage responsible gambling), and are therefore seen as detracting from the positive efforts made.
Clearly, there is widespread concern amongst club patrons about problem gambling. As such, they are generally supportive of any responsible gambling efforts implemented so far. However, they also feel that much more could be done by both gambling venues and government.

Further, the study uncovered specific industry practices that respondents considered questionable and therefore in need of improvement. Poker machine design is certainly an area where many people feel that changes are warranted. Current signage was also considered largely ineffective. Aspects of gaming room design (e.g. dim lighting, no windows) and the dominance of gaming machines within the overall club environment were also highly criticised as contributing to irresponsible gambling behaviour. The placement of ATMs very close to gaming machine rooms, delays in obtaining change and manual payouts, and club promotions that encourage people to remain in the venue for long periods of time were also seen as contributing to gambling problems.

While the incidence of problem gambling remains high and community concerns remain, there is a need for further evidence of the effectiveness of existing and proposed responsible gambling measures. Because this study focused on the package of measures contained in the ClubSafe program, it does not address the deficiency of research into the effectiveness of individual measures and ways they might be improved. This type of research could focus on assessing and improving individual measures, such as developing the most effective responsible gambling signage, determining the influence of different types of gambling promotions on gambling behaviour, and examining the longer-term outcomes of self-exclusions, as but a few examples.

However, while continued research is critical to improving existing practices, developments in government policy and industry practice cannot be put on hold while such research is completed. It may be many years before research can provide definitive answers, given the inherent difficulties of data collection, the need for longitudinal studies and the desirability of experimental approaches. The advocated approach therefore is to continue attempts to improve on current practices based on the face validity of various responsible gambling measures and expert opinions of their likely effectiveness, while commissioning the necessary research.

A regulated approach is essential if responsible gambling measures are to be adequately implemented. The results from this and other studies (e.g. Australian Institute for Gambling Research, 1998; Breen, Buultjens and Hing, 2003) indicate a tendency amongst some venues to adhere to only mandatory responsible gambling requirements. Voluntary practices that transcend the law appear less widely practised, while some venues do not comply even with their legal requirements. In this study, many of the measures advocated by the ClubSafe program, but not required in regulations and not as widely practised, related to the environment in gambling areas, including having windows, adequate lighting, and encouraging breaks in play. Others related to promotions that provide strong inducements to gamble. Another was signage on self-exclusion and local counselling services. Clearly, without the incentive of legislation, some responsible gambling practices will be ignored by some gambling venues. If government and industry are serious about introducing certain measures, then they must be legislated.

While this paper has been based on research into responsible gambling measures in clubs, it is likely that the same type of research in hotels and other gambling venues would reveal similar criticisms and concerns to those raised in this study.

Note
This paper draws primarily on a research project conducted in 2003 by the Centre for Gambling Education and Research at Southern Cross University. This study, titled 'An Assessment of Member Awareness, Perceived Adequacy and Perceived Effectiveness of Responsible Gambling Strategies in Sydney Clubs' (Hing, 2003), received financial assistance from the New South Wales Government from the Casino Community Benefit Fund. However, the views expressed in this paper are solely those of the author.

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