Summary

There is an established link between problem gambling and family violence. Recent international research indicates that people who have significant problems with their gambling are more likely than people without gambling problems to be the victims and perpetrators of family violence.

Although less than 1% of Australians have significant issues with their gambling, for each person with significant gambling issues, around 7.3 ‘significant others’ are adversely affected. Impaired family relationships, emotional problems and financial difficulties are some of the most common effects on family members of people with gambling problems.

The use of Electronic Gaming Machines/pokies (EGMs) accounts for about 75 – 80% of problem gambling. The highest concentration of EGMs and the highest losses per head occur in the most socially and economically disadvantaged communities in Victoria.

Family violence is an enormous problem in our community with 1 in 3 Australian women have experienced physical violence from a current or former partner; and 1 in 4 Australian women having experienced emotional abuse by a current or former partner.

Whilst there is a clear link between problem gambling and intimate partner violence, children, parents and grandparents are also the victims of violence perpetrated by those with significant gambling problems.

What is lacking within the current policy and research environment are long-term prevention strategies, which are based on a well conceptualised prevention framework that recognises the social determinants of health and how they relate to problem gambling and family violence.
There are between 310,000 and 510,000 adults in Australia who are experiencing moderate or significant problems with their gambling (Productivity Commission, 2010, p. 5.1) and on average the lives of 7.3 ‘significant others’ are adversely affected by every person experiencing gambling related problems (Productivity Commission, 1999, p. 7.34).

The harms from problem gambling include: suicide, depression, relationship breakdown, lowered work productivity, job loss, bankruptcy and crime (Productivity Commission, 2010, p. 16.). In a 2011 Victorian study, the prevalence of problem gambling in people presenting with acute mental health issues was found to be four times that of the general population (de Castella, Bolding, Lee, Cosic, & Kulkarni, 2011).

Common problems reported by family members of people with gambling problems include: the loss of household or personal money; arguments; anger and violence; lies and deception; neglect of family; negatively affected relationships; poor communication; confusion of family roles and responsibilities; and the development of gambling problems or other addictions within the family (Kalischuk, Nowatzki, Cardwell, Klein, & Solowoniuk, 2006, cited in Dowling, 2014).

Women are significantly less likely to be problem gamblers compared to men (0.47% and 0.95% respectively of the total population) (Department of Justice, 2012).
In 2013/14, $2.5 billion was lost to EGM gambling within Victoria, the equivalent of $4.6 million per venue, $90,000 per machine, or $549 for every adult in Victoria, per annum (Brown, 2014; Productivity Commission, 2010, p. 1.). This equates to losses of up to $500,000 per hour on EGMs during peak times in Victoria.2

It is estimated that EGMs account for 75 – 80 % of problem gamblers (Productivity Commission, 2010, p. 13). Although overall expenditure on EGMs has slowed, and in some instances decreased across Australia, expenditure per machine user appears to have risen, suggesting that those who are using EGMs are spending more (Productivity Commission, 2010, p. 2.1). This suggests that the impacts of problem gambling are concentrated amongst a group of gamblers that spends a disproportionate amount on EGM gambling.

In 2013, the Victorian Competition and Efficiency Commission estimated that in the 2010/11 financial year the social and economic costs of problem gambling in Victoria were likely to have been between $1.5 billion and $2.8 billion.3

In Victoria, the most disadvantaged communities tend to incur the highest gambling losses. In 2013/14, for instance, gambling losses among EGMs situated in Greater Dandenong – the least affluent locality in metropolitan Melbourne – stood at $940 per adult, over six times higher than the corresponding rate of $142 in Boroondara – one of the most advantaged municipalities in the state. Thus the residents of the community with the highest gambling losses in Victoria are the least able to bear the financial burden.3

Hume, Whittlesea, Darebin and Monash are local government areas within the northern and eastern metropolitan regions of Melbourne which incur high losses per adult on EGMs.

Most gambling losses are funded not by savings, but by reduced spending on other goods (South Australian Centre for Economic Studies, 2005, cited in Brown, 2014).
Facts on Gender-based Violence

The term family (or domestic) violence encompasses violence between partners and former partners as well as violence that occurs between other family members, such as siblings, children or parents, as well as non-related carers. Family violence is any violent, threatening, coercive or controlling behaviour. This includes not only physical injury but direct or indirect threats, sexual assault, emotional and psychological torment, economic control, damage to property, social isolation and any behaviour which causes a person to live in fear.

- 1 in 5 Australian women have experienced sexual violence.
- 1 in 6 Australian women have experienced physical or sexual violence from a current or former partner.
- 1 in 4 Australian women have experienced emotional abuse by a current or former partner.
- 1 in 3 Australian women have experienced physical violence.

Women are most likely to be assaulted by a partner or former partner. This type of violence is often referred to as intimate partner violence (IPV).
- Most violence experienced by women and men is perpetrated by men. For 95% of women and 95% of men who have experienced violence since the age of 15, their perpetrator was male.
- Men are most likely to be assaulted by men they don’t know, whereas women are more likely to be assaulted by someone they know.
- Family violence is a crime in Victoria and family violence referrals to police have more than tripled in northern metropolitan Melbourne since 2009/10.

Addressing the primary determinants of men’s violence against women – namely gender inequality and adherence to rigidly defined gender roles – will help to prevent all forms of family violence before it occurs. A gender equity focus needs to be central to any efforts aimed at preventing family violence.

A number of factors also contribute to family violence when they interact with gender inequality. Problem gambling is regarded as one of these contributing factors to family violence.
Current Research on the Co-occurrence of Family Violence and Problem Gambling

There is now consistent international evidence that gambling is a contributing factor to IPV and family violence more broadly (Dowling et al., 2014; Suomi et al., 2013). Research indicates that people who have gambling problems are more likely than people without gambling problems to be victims and perpetrators of family violence (Dowling, 2014).

Meta-analyses undertaken by Nicki Dowling and her colleagues (2014), reveal that over one-third of people with gambling problems report being the victims of physical IPV (38%) or the perpetrators of physical IPV (37%), whilst 11% of offenders of IPV report gambling problems. Furthermore, over half of people with gambling problems (56%) report perpetrating physical violence against their children.

Suomi and her colleagues note in their 2013 study that over half of the family members of problem gamblers reported some form of family violence in the past 12 months and 34.2% reported that the family violence was perpetrated by or against at least one problem gambling family member. They also note that the participants reported that ‘problem gambling and family violence were related in over 70% of their problem gambling family members’ (p.11).

Whilst gambling is clearly identified as a contributing factor to IPV in current research, the picture is complex, with Dowling and her colleagues suggesting in their 2014 paper that several factors are implicated in the co-occurrence of gambling and IPV. They suggest that less than full employment and anger problems seem to exacerbate the co-occurrence of gambling problems and experiencing IPV, while younger age, less than full employment, anger problems, impulsivity, and alcohol and drug use seem to exacerbate the co-occurrence of gambling and the perpetration of IPV.

“...OVER HALF OF PEOPLE WITH GAMBLING PROBLEMS (56%) REPORT PERPETRATING PHYSICAL VIOLENCE AGAINST THEIR CHILDREN.”

Dowling and her colleagues suggest that the findings of their research highlight the need for public health and treatment services to routinely screen and assess for a range of issues, including gambling problems, family violence, alcohol and drug use problems and mental health issues, and provide treatments designed to manage this cluster of conditions.

Research by the Women’s Information and Referral Exchange (2008) into women experiencing problem gambling and isolation suggests that some women who are experiencing family violence use EGM venues as a safe space away from home.
Areas for Future Work that Addresses the Co-occurrence of Family Violence and Problem Gambling

Whilst the research of Suomi, Dowling and their colleagues has provided much needed information on the co-occurrence of family violence and problem gambling, much more data, both quantitative and qualitative is needed. Specifically, more data is required on the prevalence of gambling within families presenting to services for help with family violence issues, and research is also needed into the economic, health and social costs to individuals and families when this co-occurrence exists.

More research into violence perpetrated against parents, grandparents and children, as well as other relatives and care-givers, is also critical.

Currently there is increasing evidence about the health and wellbeing consequences of gambling (McDonald & Greenslade, 2014). More research into the social and financial costs to communities of the impacts of the co-occurrence of family violence and problem gambling, including the costs to the health, legal and welfare systems, is necessary.

What is lacking within the current policy and research environment are long-term prevention strategies, which are based on a well conceptualised prevention framework that recognises the social determinants of health and how they relate to problem gambling and family violence.

This document has been prepared to provide information to family violence and gambling advocates on the co-occurrence of family violence and problem gambling. Whilst every care has been taken to provide accurate and up-to-date information, WHIN and WHE do not take responsibility for the accuracy of data collated from other sources and recommend that primary sources, as appears in the reference list, should be referred to.
References


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