

Submission to Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence

From

‘Increasing the Odds for Safety and Respect’ Project Partnership.

The partnership organisations are Women’s Health In the North, Women’s Health East, North East Primary Care Partnership and Inner East Primary Care Partnership.

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Summary

There is an established link between Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), family violence and problem gambling, with research suggesting that there is family violence in up to 50 per cent of families where there problem gambling occurs. This includes high rates of physical harm towards children.

Many health and human services sectors routinely screen for, and address family violence in their service provision, research and ongoing staff professional development. However, the problem gambling sector does not routinely incorporate family violence into these work practices.

There are currently limited response services for men who perpetrate violence. In not identifying and addressing the perpetration of violence by men against family members when they present for counselling, an opportunity for suitable referrals may be missed. The provision of training to counsellors on how to work with men who use violence would greatly enhance their skills to address the issue appropriately.

75-80 per cent of problem gamblers use electronic gaming machines (EGMs/'the pokies'). EGMs in Victoria are predominantly high-intensity, high-risk machines.ⁱ One key way to reduce gambling related family violence is to minimise the incidence of problem gambling by making EGMs in Victoria safer.

'Increasing the Odds for Safety and Respect' Project

The Increasing the Odds for Safety and Respect project is an early intervention and prevention project in which staff from Women's Health In the North and Women's Health East are working with family violence and problem gambling service providers across the northern and eastern metropolitan regions of Melbourne to share knowledge about the link between family violence and problem gambling. Information about this link can be found in our recently published [Gambling and Family Violence Fact Sheet](#).

Problem Gambling and Family Violence

There is clear evidence that family violence is a gendered issue. The biggest risk factor for being a victim of family violence is being a woman.ⁱⁱ

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 violence against women before it occurs, including family violence. A gender equity focus needs to be central to any efforts aimed at preventing family violence.

There are a number of factors that may contribute to family violence. There is now consistent international evidence that gambling is one of these contributing factors to intimate partner violence (IPV) and family violence more broadly.ⁱⁱⁱ Research indicates that people who have gambling problems are more likely than people without gambling problems to be victims and perpetrators of family violence.^{iv}

The most recent research is from the 2013 Australian arm of a large-scale study of the patterns and prevalence of co-occurrence of family violence and problem gambling in Australia, New Zealand and Hong Kong^v which screened 120 help-seeking family members of problem gamblers in a range of clinical services for both family violence and problem gambling.

The main results of this study indicated that 52.5 per cent reported some form of family violence in the previous 12 months: 20.0 per cent reported only victimisation, 10.8 per cent reported only perpetration and 21.6 per cent reported both victimisation and perpetration of family violence. They also noted the ‘participants reported that problem gambling and family violence were related in over 70 per cent of their problem gambling family members’.

According to a meta-analysis carried out by Nicki Dowling from Deakin University and her colleagues, over one-third of people with gambling problems report being the victims of physical IPV (38 per cent) or the perpetrators of IPV (37 per cent). Moreover, 11 per cent of offenders of IPV report gambling problems. Furthermore, over half of people with gambling problems (56 per cent) report perpetrating physical violence against their children. The researchers suggest that these findings ‘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.’^{vi}

The researchers suggest that further work is required to investigate the nature of the relationship between problem gambling and IPV and the relationship between problem gambling and violence that extends into the family beyond intimate partners.

Research into women experiencing problem gambling and isolation suggests that some women who are experiencing family violence use pokie venues as a safe space away from home.^{vii} Some of these women report that they then develop a problem with gambling as EGMs are designed to be addictive.

The majority of the current quantitative research data is non-gendered and therefore does not provide a complete picture of the problem of family violence in families in which there is gambling. Without this knowledge it is difficult to get a complete picture of the harm that women and children experience in these families.

Research indicates that female victims of family violence experience higher levels of fear and sustain more significant injuries and lethality than male victims of family violence. There is no current data within the cohort of families where there is gambling and family violence to indicate whether this pattern is the same and without this knowledge it is difficult to determine where resourcing within the sector should be distributed.

Consultation Findings

In 2014, as part of the ‘Increasing the Odds for Safety and Respect’ project, consultations were conducted with service providers in the northern and eastern regions of metropolitan Melbourne.

Relevant findings to the Royal Commission into Family Violence are:

- It would be beneficial to include questions about family violence in problem gambling assessment tools, and problem gambling listed as a contributing factor in the Common Risk Assessment Framework (CRAF) used by family violence service providers. Currently, inclusion of these items is implemented on a service-by-service basis.
- The co-location of services and out-posting of workers (for example a family violence specialist worker out-posted to a Gamblers Help service) assists cross-sector referrals and improves understanding of complexities and intersections of both workforces.
- There was an identified need for cross-sector training, particularly on how to identify and work with male perpetrators of violence. There are currently a number of highly skilled practitioners in this field.

However, not all counsellors have received this training and therefore, not all financial and therapeutic counsellors are adequately equipped to work with men who use violence.

- There was recognition by practitioners that gambling and family violence co-occur. However, more research is needed to confirm anecdotal evidence and to improve responses to clients.

Recommendations

1. That there be a greater level of integration between the problem gambling and family violence sectors, which could be facilitated through co-location of services, out-posting of staff, and cross sector professional development.
2. That problem gambling services commit to incorporating professional development on family violence into the annual training calendar of their therapeutic and financial counselling staff. This training should include how to work effectively and safely with women experiencing family violence and how to work with male perpetrators of violence.
3. That family violence organisations, including men's behaviour change services, are resourced to incorporate problem gambling professional development into their annual training calendar.
4. That, drawing on existing international and Australian evidence, the Victorian Government legislate to make EGMs safer in Victoria.
5. That resources be directed towards developing an increased knowledge-base about women's use of gambling venues as a 'safe space' away from family violence, and that resources be directed towards addressing this.
6. That a gendered perspective be applied to any future research funded by government.
7. That future social-impact research into the intersection between family violence and problem gambling consider the disproportionate effects of gambling on women.
8. That specialist family violence, financial counselling and problem gambling services be resourced adequately to address the intersection between family violence and problem gambling.
9. That problem gambling be included as a risk factor in the Family Violence Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework (CRAF) and that family violence be included in problem gambling assessment tools.
10. That problem gambling be listed as a contributing factor in future models of the prevention of violence against women.

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- i http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/Former_Committees/gamblingreform/completedinquires/2010-13/precommitmentscheme/report/output/b02
- ii <http://www.anrows.org.au/publications/fast-facts/key-statistics-violence-against-women>
- iii Dowling, N., Suomi, A., Jackson, A., Lavis, T., Patford, J., Cockman, S., et al. (2014). *Problem Gambling and Intimate Partner Violence: A systematic review and Meta-Analysis*. Advance online publication. DOI: 10.1177/1524838014561269, retrieved from <http://tva.sagepub.com/content/early/2014/12/02/1524838014561269.abstract>,
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- iv Dowling, N. (2014). *The impact of gambling problems on families*. AGRC Discussion Paper No. 1 – November 2014, retrieved from <https://www3.aifs.gov.au/agrc/publications/impact-gambling-problems-families/what-are-impacts-gambling-problems-families>
- v Suomi et al., Op cit.
- vi Dowling, Op cit.
- vi Women's Information and Referral Exchange. (2008). *Opening doors to women*. Wire: Melbourne, retrieved from <http://www.wire.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/OpeningDoors.pdf>