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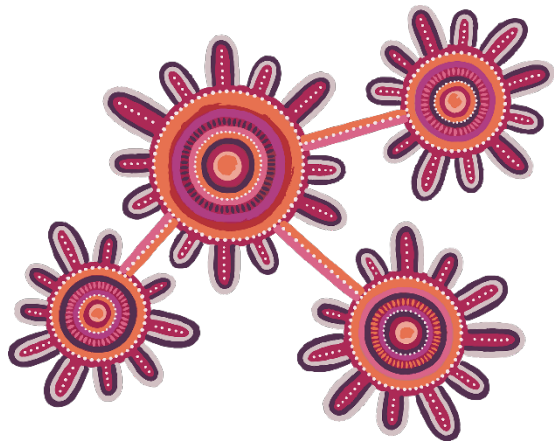
Coping to Control: Understanding Gambling Experiences to Inform Harm Minimisation Policy

Australian Gambling Research Centre
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Acknowledgement of Country



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The Australian Institute of Family Studies acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognises their continuing connection to lands and waters. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and to Elders past and present.

Acknowledgments

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Overview

- Background
- Purpose
- Methods
- Findings and Implications

- Australians lost **\$33 billion** through gambling in 2024-25
- Community concern about gambling harm is increasing:
 - **77%** believe there are **too many opportunities** to **gamble**
 - **59%** believe gambling should be discouraged
 - **17%** believe gambling benefits society
- **10.1** Electronic Gaming Machines (EGMs) “pokies” per 1,000 adults

Aim of this study

To:

- better understand the experiences of people who gamble regularly via online wagering and / or electronic gambling machines (EGM)
- gain insight into how gambling behaviours develop, how harms are experienced, and where opportunities for prevention and harm reduction may arise

- Purposive sampling - 2024 National Gambling Trends Study (NGTS)
- Regular gamblers (at least monthly)
- 30 semi-structure interviews
- Data analysed using reflexive thematic analysis

Participants

- 30 regular gamblers from across Australia
- 63% were aged 25-44 years
- 57% were men
- 67% were high-risk gamblers (PGSI = 8+)

Key Findings

- Gambling was widely **normalised through family, social and digital environments**
- **Major life events** often influenced gambling behaviours and motivations
- Strong beliefs in **personal control and individual responsibility** were common
- Participants supported **earlier education and prevention**

The Gambling Life Journey: Common Patterns



repeated
exposure

normalised
gambling

turning
points

gambling
as coping

control
narratives

prevention

Normalisation - gambling is part of everyday life

- Gambling becomes normal through repeated exposure through:
 - Family
 - Social
 - Sporting
 - Community and digital environments
- Begins in Childhood and reinforced through:
 - Family relationships
 - Peer, sporting and online groups
 - Gambling promotional activities

I remember when I used to go, like mum would go and she'd have a beer at the pub... But I remember the poker machines, kids could go in there.

[P14: male, NSW, 35-44 yrs]

On Thursday night after training, we'd go to the pub for team selection, and there would be a time that I'd probably be gambling because other people around are gambling too.

[P9: male, SA, 18-24 yrs]

Whenever you turn on any sort of sport these days, you see the odds, you see the ads and all that for it so it's probably in my face a little bit more.

[P20: male VIC 35-44 yrs]

Turning Points

I had a relationship breakdown, and I had issues with my accommodation as well where I was living. So, it was a combination of a whole bunch of things...I was just trying to distract myself from, really.
[P14: male, NSW, 35-44 yrs]

- Major life events coincided with a change in gambling behaviour
- Gambling shifted from **recreation to a coping mechanism**
- Recognition that gambling was **no longer manageable**

My gambling really became an issue for me back in 2016 when my mum passed away...I think it was just a way to distract myself maybe. I kind of see it as almost like a form of self-harm, I guess, in a way.
[P14: male, NSW, 35-44 yrs]

A lot of it is with my emotional state too I've noticed. So, if I'm having a hard time, I've noticed that I gamble more. So, if I'm going through a rough patch, I'll use that as like a thing to make me feel better.
[P2: male, WA, 25-34 yrs]

Control Beliefs Decisions

- Belief that gambling can be controlled through **skill, strategy and self-discipline**
- Reliance on **personal rules and limits** to manage gambling
- Strong focus on **individual responsibility**
- Control beliefs supported **continued gambling despite losses**
- Confidence in self-control could **delay harm recognition**

Everything's still manageable for me... I've seen other people lose a lot of money...and they borrow from friends and family.
[P2: male, 25-34, WA]

Well, when we go to the pokies I don't actually take an ATM card.
So, like I'll take cash...
[P16: female, Qld, 35-44 yrs]

I don't use those stats but it's mainly gut feel. My gut feels in the right direction...yes, like I follow the teams and I follow certain horses and dogs...yes, and I do notice trends. I've been doing it for a while so I – yes, you do pick up things here and there. Even though it's just gut feel.
[P13: male, NSW, 35-44 yrs]

Prevention and Education

- Earlier awareness of **gambling risks, odds and harms**
- Prevention **before gambling becomes normalised**
- Support **early education and awareness-raising** about gambling
- Education alongside **consumer information and harm-minimisation measures**
- Prevention **across the life course**

If someone had explained the odds properly when I was younger, it might have changed how I saw it [gambling].
[P9: male, SA, 18-24 yrs]

I think education needs to be started in schools... to actually start bringing these sorts of things in at school level...look at how it works...at how it sucks you in. And the machines and horseracing...you know what I'm saying? Like how all this sucks you in. Especially the pokies...
[P29: female, SA, 65+ yrs]

There's got to be posters around the pokie machines. There's got to be pamphlets here and pamphlets there...It's there, but not everyone sees it.
[P19: male, QLD, 25-34 yrs]

Future Directions: Participant Insights

- **EGM design features** (lights, sounds, jackpots and machine density) encourage continued play
- **Immersive venues make it difficult to disengage**
- Online gambling is **highly accessible and difficult to avoid**.
- Gambling **advertising is pervasive** especially in sport
- Support for **tighter advertising restrictions**

If the machines were black and white, I don't think anyone would play them for long.

[P10: female, NSW, 35-44 yrs]

I think all gambling marketing should be gone, same as when they got rid of the alcohol ads, cigarette ads, just get rid of gambling ads.

[P10: female, NSW, 35-44 yrs]

Probably the noise and the excitement, like as I said the pokie machines, hearing them go off. Someone's winning. It's like, 'Maybe I could win if I go there.' [P12: male, Qld, 45-54 yrs]

...the accessibility for gambling in this country is just so big. It's just so easy...you're in a pub having a beer to watch the footy – the pokies are just always there.

[P1: male, NSW, 25-34 yrs]

Key Takeaways

- Gambling is shaped by **social, environmental and life-course factors**
- Harm does not arise from **individual choices alone**
- Prevention should begin **early and continue across the life course**
- Stronger **consumer protections and reduced exposure** are needed
- Responsibility for preventing harm should be **shared across individuals, communities, services and policy systems**