

Enterprise and Lifelong Learning

Research on the Social Impacts of Gambling

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with
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Introduction

This report was commissioned to provide an assessment of the social impacts of gambling, and particularly casino gambling, in Scotland, and is based on a review of the international research evidence.

Main Findings

- Understanding of the social impacts of gambling is limited by a shortage of high quality research. The field is complex, and some findings are contradictory. However, some broad conclusions are beginning to emerge.
- Accessibility of gambling is correlated with problem playing, with widely dispersed non-casino electronic machines associated with the highest rates of problematic playing worldwide.
- Increasing the availability of gambling also increases rates of problem gambling. However, longitudinal research suggests that this trend may level out or decline over time as communities adapt to the presence of gambling around them. Public health policies that focus on the provision of treatment and information about problem gambling can also militate against such increases.
- Problem gambling affects between 0.6 – 0.8% of the British adult population and impacts most severely on disadvantaged social groups who experience high levels of poverty, unemployment and low levels of education.
- Currently, around 3% of the adult population gamble in casinos, and of these between 5 – 8% are considered problem gamblers. Single, unemployed males under thirty years of age and single, retired males over forty, especially those who are of Chinese ethnicity, are more likely to experience problems with casino gambling.
- The impacts of casinos vary by size and geographical location. Large casinos that are located away from population centres and attract large numbers of non-local visitors are typically associated with the lowest social costs. Smaller urban or suburban casinos that draw on local populations tend to be associated with higher social costs.

About this Study

This study was undertaken through a review of the international research evidence, as well as relevant British research, on the social impacts of gambling and casinos. It also analysed fresh data from the 1999 Prevalence Survey of gambling in Great Britain to investigate patterns of gambling behaviour in Scotland.

Research Limitations

Understanding of the field is hampered by a serious lack of high quality research which significantly limits the ability to draw firm conclusions on the impacts of gambling. As a result, both the negative as well as the positive effects of gambling, particularly casino gambling, tend to be overstated.

Problem Gambling

Problem gambling is defined as behaviour that is out of control and that disrupts personal, family, financial and employment relations. It is estimated that between 0.6 - 0.8% of the population in Britain are problem gamblers (between 275,000 and 370,000 people). The percentages of the population are similar for Scotland.

Risk Factors and Disadvantaged Groups

Disadvantaged social groups who experience poverty, unemployment, low levels of education and household income are most likely to suffer the adverse consequences of increased gambling. Single males aged under thirty five years are also at risk from developing problems. Problem gamblers are more likely than non-problem players to have heavy levels of consumption of drugs, alcohol and cigarettes.

Although individuals from these groups may not spend more on gambling in absolute terms, they do spend a higher proportion of their incomes than wealthier players.

Electronic Gaming Machines (EGMs)

Availability and convenience are strongly associated with problem gambling. EGMs that are located outside casinos and are widely dispersed throughout the community in venues such as bars, hotels and clubs are associated with the highest rates of problem gambling worldwide.

Casino Gambling

Currently, around 3% of the population gamble in casinos, although this is likely to increase as the effects of the new legislation come into force. Of these, between 5 - 8% are considered problem gamblers (less than a quarter of one per cent of the adult population).

Casino patrons have higher levels of income and education than other gamblers, and in general, individuals with lower levels of income and education are less likely to visit casinos than the general population. However, when they do, they tend to experience more problems with their playing.

In Britain, two groups experience problems with casino gambling: single unemployed males under thirty, and single, retired males aged over forty, especially those who are of Chinese ethnicity. These individuals also have higher levels of tobacco and alcohol consumption than other players.

Casino Impacts

Research has found that proximity to casinos increases rates of problem gambling in the local population. Some studies have found that the location of a casino within 50 miles of an individual's home can double the prevalence of problem gambling, although other work also suggests that the provision of specialist problem gambling services and public health initiatives can militate against such increases.

Casinos do not appear to increase *per capita* crime, although *total* crime in a neighbourhood may increase as a result of population growth. Casinos tend to

attract large numbers of visitors to an area, and casino jurisdictions can also experience population growth, increasing the overall population who can commit or fall victim to crime.

This effect appears to be concentrated on specific types of crime, such as burglary, and does not seem to affect violent crime and most street crimes. Fear of crime does not appear to increase in communities that introduce casinos, and may actually decrease due to the presence of casinos' own security measures and the development of run-down areas.

Types of Casinos

Casinos are distinguished by a range of factors, including size and geographical location, which can result in very different impacts. Large 'resort' casinos are often located away from major population centres and incorporate a range of leisure facilities which makes them attractive to tourists. In contrast, smaller casinos are often located in more urban or suburban environments and offer fewer facilities, with less potential for attracting tourists.

The social costs of casinos tend to be exported to the areas where the gamblers who play them live. This means that 'resort' and rural casinos tend to be associated with the lowest social costs, since their customers are largely drawn from outwith the immediate area. However, urban or suburban casinos tend to draw large numbers of local residents to them, meaning that social costs often remain within the community.

Long Term Impacts

Longitudinal studies from Australia, New Zealand and the U.S. have found that the prevalence of problem gambling has remained stable or declined over time despite the introduction of casinos and other forms of gambling. This has been attributed to the provision of public awareness campaigns and treatment services, as well as processes of adaptation whereby

communities adjust to the presence of gambling around them.

Prevention and Treatment

The provision of public health information and specialised treatment services targeted towards 'at risk' groups can help to combat the potential negative effects of increased casino gambling.

Public health approaches that focus on the prevention of problem behaviour in the general population can save costs in the long term, since, across a range of behavioural / mental health disorders, severe problem gambling is one of the most difficult and expensive to treat.

Casinos in Scotland

In Scotland, small casinos located in urban or suburban areas have the greatest potential for negative social impacts, particularly if those areas are already characterised by high levels of social deprivation.

However, the real question is the extent to which any of the proposed casinos would draw on their local populations. At present, it is not possible to predict the extent to which these casinos might attract local residents who are at risk from developing gambling problems.

In addition, steps taken by public authorities to prevent the development of gambling problems could have a significant effect on the eventual social impact of casinos. Given this, it is crucial that public authorities adopt a proactive approach to ensure that the appropriate resources to prevent and treat problem gambling are specifically targeted within the areas that might host or be proximate to casinos.

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The report, "Research on the Social Impacts of Gambling", which is summarised in this research findings is a web only document and is available on the publications pages of the Scottish Executive website:

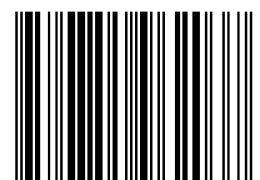
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