

LGBTQ+ PEOPLE AND GAMBLING HARMS: A SCOPING REVIEW

LAY SUMMARY

Overview

This is a review of the latest evidence on the topic of gambling harms within the LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer+) community. The review covers international literature on the prevalence of gambling harms in this community, and its potential impact on mental health, finances, relationships, and employment. The review also considers the factors which may lead someone to be at risk of gambling harm, as well as factors which may reduce the risk of gambling harm and/or its potential impact. Lastly, the review examines all available evidence pertaining to LGBTQ+ people's experiences of accessing support services to address gambling harm, and any issues or barriers there-in.

Key questions

Guided by the following question - 'What is known about gambling in LGBTQ+ communities?' - the review considers i) the prevalence of gambling harm across LGBTQ+ communities; ii) the experiences of LGBTQ+ people in relation to gambling harm; iii) evidence of any interventions to reduce harm in this community; iv) the barriers that LGBTQ+ people may experience in accessing services; and, iv) protective factors that guard against or reduce gambling harm within this community.

Rationale

To date, the available research on LGBTQ+ gambling has focused only on academic literature. This review adds value by bringing together the latest known evidence from across both academic literature and non-academic literature (such as government reports, research conducted by charities and non-governmental organisations etc) to help shape recommendations for policy, to improving community awareness, and for assisting professionals and support services.

Methods

The review draws on available evidence written in English and published between 2000 and 2023. Only articles that focused on gambling in the LGBTQ+ community were included. Searches were undertaken up to 16 October 2023 across academic databases and relevant websites. In addition, experts in the field were consulted for their recommendations, and a 'breadcrumb' trail followed to identify further articles to be included as identified by relevant bibliographies and reference lists. Whilst the academic literature was international in scope, the non-academic literature was confined to Great Britain and countries with similar legal and policy contexts

(such as Western Europe). The quality of the articles was assessed via two tools – 1) a CASP (Critical Appraisal Skills Programme) questionnaire for the academic literature and 2) a Weight of evidence approach for the non-academic literature. The review included a total of 19 papers (16 academic articles; 3 non-academic articles).

Results

Prevalence: The results were mixed regarding the prevalence of gambling and associated harms within the LGBTQ+ community, however some evidence suggests that gay/bisexual/queer men and young lesbian/gay/bisexual adults may be at increased risk, and may experience greater harms associated with gambling. Transgender youth are more likely to experience gambling harm compared to their cisgender (non-trans) peers, with trans youth assigned ‘male’ at birth showing the highest risk. One study found that trans people with refugee status had the highest risk of gambling harm compared to other groups.




Whilst research in this area is limited, there is some evidence to suggest that fears around disclosure of sexuality or transgender status, and anticipated stigma, may be a risk factor for gambling harm, where gambling offered a form of escapism.

Prevalence: The results yielded mixed evidence regarding the prevalence of gambling and gambling harms within LGBTQ+ communities. There is, however, consistent evidence that trans and gender diverse people may experience higher levels of gambling harms compared to cisgender (non-trans) people.

Gambling harms: There is limited research focussing on the lived experience of gambling harms amongst LGBTQ+ communities in GB. In addition, few studies have examined the wider impact of gambling (e.g., financial harm, negative impact on relationships and work) amongst LGBTQ+ people. The few studies which did examine gambling-associated harms found that sexual minority men reported high rates of participation in gambling activities associated with greater gambling harms, such as electronic gambling machines, horse/greyhound racing, and sports betting (Bush et al, 2021).

Risk and protective factors: There is some evidence to suggest that general anxiety around everyday disclosures of gender identity or sexual orientation, and anticipated stigma, may be a risk factor for gambling harms where gambling offers a form of escapism (Bush-Evans, 2023). There is also some evidence linking higher levels of drug and alcohol use to gambling harms (Birch et al, 2015; Mattelin et al, 2022). In terms of factors which reduce risk, higher levels of support and community connection were shown to be linked to lower levels of gambling harm within LGBTQ+ communities.

Gambling-related help-seeking, service barriers, and interventions: No studies were identified in the current review which looked at services or interventions for LGBTQ+ people experiencing gambling harms. The limited research that was available focused on accessing mental health



and social care services in general (Bush et al, 2020). General health service barriers included professionals' discriminatory attitudes and a lack of general awareness about LGBTQ+ people's healthcare needs (Bush et al, 2020; Mattelin et al, 2022). Elsewhere, there is some evidence suggesting that LGBTQ+ people who gamble may experience shame both on account of their LGBTQ+ status as well as their gambling habits, which can act as a barrier to seeking help.

Conclusion

Research on LGBTQ+ gambling harm remains limited. The mixed findings over prevalence show the need for a range of new research from large-scale studies which explore LGBTQ+ people's relationship to gambling over time, to interview-based studies exploring people's everyday experiences of gambling and its consequences. The review also highlights the need for standardised recording of LGBTQ+ people's sexual orientation and gender identity, as well as developing tools to identify gambling risk and harm more consistently. Research with greater community involvement to consider the unique needs and perspectives of LGBTQ+ people, co-produced with them, is urgently needed.