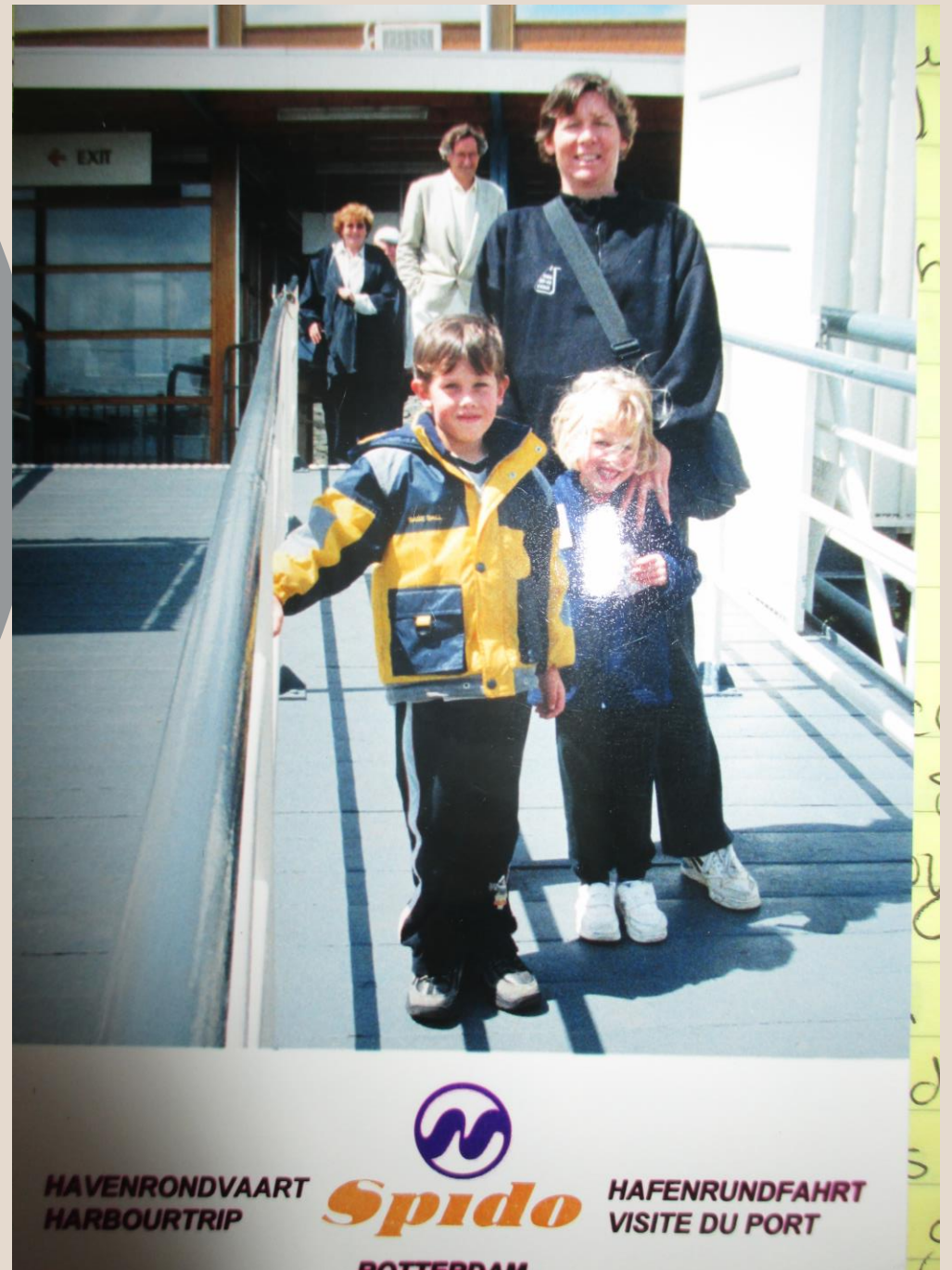


The psychological toxicity of working in the gambling environment

Natalie Bossi



Personal background





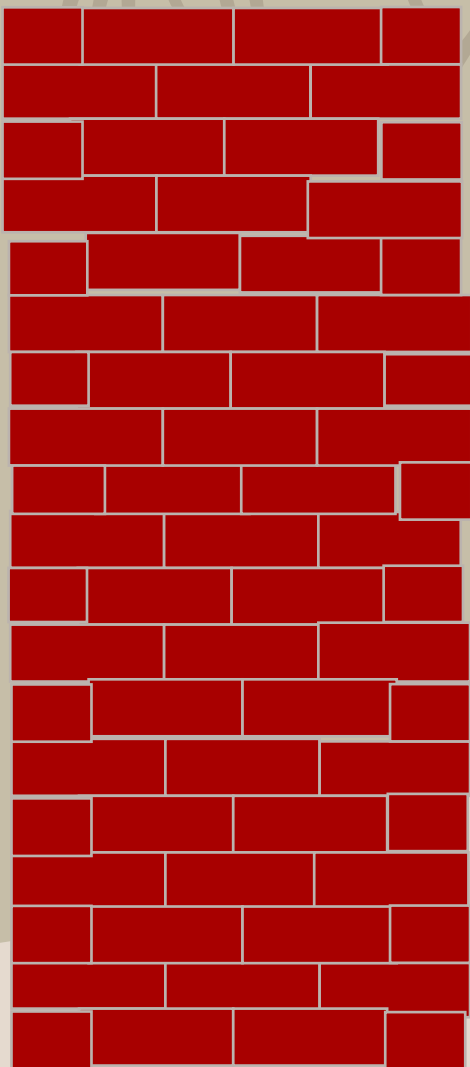
Addiction is inter-generational



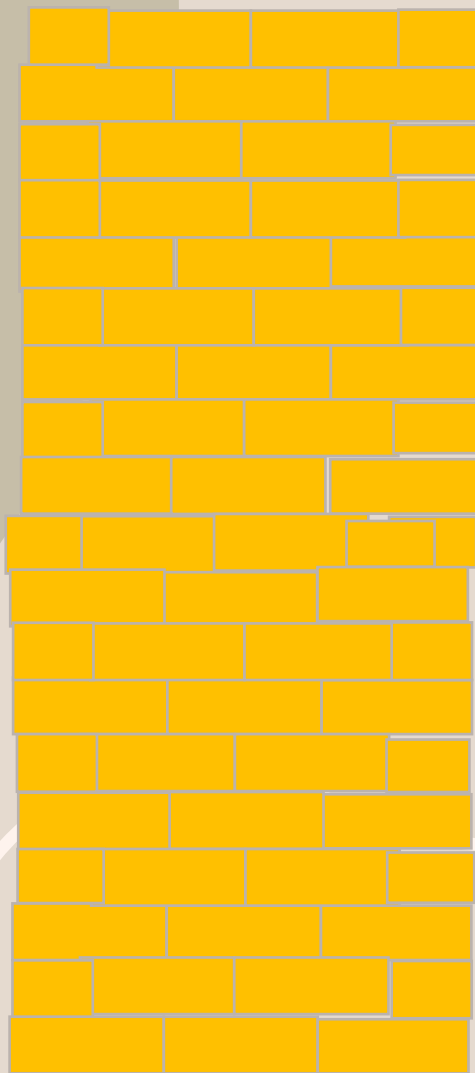
Family with alcohol use problems



Substance
abuser



Family



Each need to have their
own RECOVERY
process, these paths
never meet but run
parallel to each other

“Of course given the numbers of affected family members, some of the policy makers and researchers are affected family members as well, but that’s not the heading over the door that they’re coming in under.” -Prof R Velleman

Addiction counsellor
& addiction trainer



Introduction

NRGP Training offers Responsible Gambling training to all employees in the gambling industry across South Africa, as well as in certain neighbouring countries.

All sectors of the commercial and legal gambling industry, i.e. casino, LPM/slot machine operators, horseracing, totes, bookmakers, as well as the bingo industry.

National and provincial regulators/gambling boards
NRGP problem gambling counselling line staff

Winners know when to stop

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COUNSELLING PHONE
0800 006 008**



NATIONAL
**Responsible
Gambling**
PROGRAMME

**e-mail: counsellor@responsiblegambling.co.za
or send a "please call me" or sms to 076 675 0710**



Is it or isn't it ?

Does the presence of disordered gamblers make working in the gambling environment different to working in other parts of the hospitality industry?

Does this affect the employee to such an extent that it can be compared to living with an someone who has an addictive disorder?

The following will be used to explore this question:

- Some research
- My own experiences and recollections
- Two interviews with experts

How addiction can affect family

- Trauma
- Anxiety
- Abuse
- Manipulation
- Depression - Even suicidal tendencies
- Co-dependency, in the form of rescuing or enabling, obsession with the addict, controlling behaviour and over-sensitivity and hypervigilance.
- Negative health effects
- Negative financial effects
- Denial or minimization
- Substance abuse problems or other process addictions
- Exhaustion and poor sleeping patterns
- Anger, irritability.
- Irrational behaviour and thoughts.



**ARE THESE EFFECTS APPARENT AMONG STAFF
WORKING WITH GAMBLING GUESTS?**

YES
mostly

Research

“Research is to see what everybody else has seen, and to think what nobody else has thought.”

Albert Szent-Györgyi



Related and relevant research:

1. Hing, N. & Breen, H. (2005). Gambling among gaming venue employees: Counsellors' perspectives on risk and protective factors.
2. Hing, N., Cairncross, G., Breen, H. (2013). Employee Stress and Stressors in Gambling and Hospitality Workplaces. In *Journal of Human Resources in Hospitality & Tourism*, April 2013. DOI: 10.1080/15332845.2013.752708
3. Hu, S.X., Luk, A., Leong, C., U, C., Van, F. (2013). The correlations of work conditions with unhealthy lifestyles and occupational health problems of casino croupiers in Macau. *Journal of Gambling Studies*, June;29(2):255-68. doi: 10.1007/s10899-012-9301-5
4. Naudé, R. (2015). The effect of casino employees' demographic variables on quality of work-life domains. *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure* Vol. 4 (2) - (2015)

Research on this cohort

- Studies on gambling employees notoriously scarce.
- Studies available, revealing enough.
- Few reasons proffered. Might not portend well for prospective researchers.
- South African study says: “the casino industry is very protective of its employee and customer information and data” (Naude, 2015).
- Surveys do not need to compromise employee data and can be anonymised.
- It is my belief, and those of others that gambling industry pays lip service to the concept of gambling responsibly and that their primary motivation is profit at any cost.
- Creates a dysfunctional working environment which could be considered an employment conditions issue.
- Gambling industry would not encourage research.

GAMBLING AMONGST GAMING VENUE EMPLOYEES: COUNSELLORS' PERSPECTIVES ON RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS IN THE WORKPLACE

Nerilee Hing & Helen Breen

“the gambling behaviour of gaming venue staff has attracted minimal research. Only three related studies previously have been published, all based on North American casino employees. Their results indicate that problem gambling is relatively high amongst this group, although little was reported about the reasons for this”.

Research used
to build our case



Two interviews with experts

Experienced casino manager



Experienced counsellor



IN AGREEMENT – SORT OF..

Was the environment in which you worked in any way abusive or unhealthy?

Yes of course it is, or at least elements of it, due to the gamblers—



Absolutely!- on a daily basis from clients and senior personnel

How abusive or unhealthy did you consider the environment you worked in, as a new employee in the gambling industry, on a scale of 1 to 10?

- **6** – Gambling customers got frustrated and desperate when they lost their money, and they would **vent all of that emotion at the employees. They could not accept the outcome of the game and instead made it personal.**
- They would blame the casino or the dealer and staff member for the outcome. They would even claim that the system was “rigged” at a “high-level” against them and that even the staff on the ground “would not even know about it. If I had to score it in terms of being an unpleasant working environment due to the gamblers, from the perspective of a new employee, I would rate it a 6.
- That said, in the years as a manager, and being closely involved in the recruitment process, **we always looked for a certain personality, which would be better suited to such an environment.**
- **9** The problem is that the **staff are not well trained and are not protected by their seniors.**
- In SA levels of education not consistent and English is not everyone’s mother tongue, employees are often ill-equipped to cope with the gambling environment.
- They are not given sufficient support either. This results in more stress being experienced. Furthermore, **the staff that are involved in cleaning, serving and catering are not trained in gambling addiction and are abused by gambling guests. I have heard of cleaning staff being beaten by these guests.**
- Very little is done to protect and support staff in this respect.

Did this type of work seem to encourage or increase substance use or abuse, risky sex or gambling by employees?

“Some employees did confide in me over the years, as far as drug taking habits were concerned. But not many or more than average. So not that I am aware of. Yes, some would go gambling at other casinos. One employee took his retrenchment package and became a full-time gambler. And socially, employees did get together to gamble socially after work, probably more than average. And yes, there were a few unwanted pregnancies. Not many that I am aware of.”



“They have many parties after shifts where this all takes place and they go on gambling sprees to other casinos together. They also engage in risky sex.”

If so, why do you think so? (in reference to gambling)

“Employees are exposed to the big talk of gamblers all the time and eventually begin to believe that they can win as well. Also they start their own addictive behaviours to cope with the stress of work.”



No reason given

Does being a manager, or in managerial position, make any difference to your working environment and therefore the effect on you?

*“You do have a greater sense of responsibility as a manager, at least I did, and you become more invested in your staff and clients. You carry a greater burden. One experience which stands out for me was when a Muslim lady lost her money and she was in great emotional turmoil. She called her Imam and he came, trying to calm her down and eventually her brother was asked to come and fetch her. I spent many hours with this customer in trying to assist her to access help and to calm her down. I stayed well beyond my shift in order to help her. Her brother took her away and yet several hours later when I came back on shift, there she was again. **I felt completely defeated.** Despite all her remonstrations she was right back at the casino, ready to play again. This time, we asked her to leave. She was banned. I was given the authority to make these kinds of decisions and yes, it made me realize that in some cases one can care too much.”*



“I would think so, of course as one climbs the managerial ladder your circumstances both in salary, housing and at work become better.”

Do you think that the attitude of management towards the concept of “responsible gambling” makes a difference to the working environment?

*“It has a big impact. Management are expected to increase revenue and turnover. Big players provide that. And self-excluding a big player, will affect revenue and turnover. **All top-level gamblers are addicted.** So, while management is responsible for the well-being or needs of a player to some extent, which could mean recommending a self-exclusion, revenue is always a consideration. Which is why the period for a self-exclusion is usually quite short, i.e., three to six months.”*



Management’s main objective is to meet targets and to make money. Although they pay lip service to responsible gambling, their heart is not in it.

Self-exclusion

When conducted by the casino itself, lasts for short period, disordered gambler soon back on the gambling floor, adding to a dysfunctional atmosphere.

Employees know this is driven by the profit motive, and can confront them with a moral dilemma.

Self-exclusion is mostly requested by customer themselves. Lodged by the operator / provincial gambling board, in which case it would be a self-exclusion across all operators.

Means you have requested to be denied access to any gambling outlet would be prohibited. Period varies between three months to five years, to life.

Usually, customers came begging, cajoling and even threatening to have these exclusions lifted shortly after having entered into them, (the very next day) and employees found themselves in need of good counselling skills to negotiate these troubled and desperate and even aggressive conversations.



What kind of abuse is the most pervasive?

“Verbal/swearing/language can also include personal attacks. This is when the customer blames the employee for their losses or something else”.



“Gamblers drinking, using, losing and projecting onto the casino employee”.

Do you remember instances in your career which disturbed or affected you deeply and negatively?

“No, not really. You learn to “do what you have to do”. You learn to step away. You recommend the NRGP and self-exclusion and you are given or taught tools to handle such situations. Training played a very important role in teaching you how to handle such situations. When you get to a managerial position, we were given level 3 training, which included Motivational Interviewing”.

“Not to me as I did not work in the environment, but I did hear about some shocking goings on”.



What can be done to improve the gambling working environment for employees?

“Nothing really. The training we were given prepared us adequately to deal with these kinds of situations and managers were expected to mentor new and more junior managers in this regard. Our training was comprehensive and the management team was supportive of each other and the rest of the staff. For example, a swearing customer would not be tolerated, especially if they were swearing at a staff member, as opposed to themselves.”



*Training x 10,
supervision x10,
support x10*

What are successful strategies to help you flourish or survive intact in this kind of working environment?

Attitude.

Don't take things personally.

Detachment.

Provide and ensure support to employees.

Managers must be approachable, so that employees feel comfortable to confide in them.



*Training x 10,
supervision x10,
support x10*

Do you think women are the brunt of more abuse? Is there a different dynamic between male clients and female employees?

“No, I don’t think so. The supervisor is always close by and in the casinos we practiced zero-tolerance of any kind of sexual harassment, like inappropriate touching or slapping on the bum.



Fortunately, everything is recorded on camera. Audio and visual. Employees could exaggerate the extent of the misdemeanour by the customer”.

“Absolutely – the females are also often instructed to ignore improper behaviour and are ignored if they report such behaviour.

This kind of behaviour is prevalent and employees quickly get the message that they must not complain.

This is part of what I did in debriefing with staff. I helped and trained them to cope with such situations and to know what to do to set boundaries. Also, I taught them that if there was little else they could do, they needed to find ways of removing themselves from these situations. Certain casino chains were better at training their staff than others”.

Do you think some kind of co-dependency exists between clients with a gambling disorder and the employees who observe and serve them?

“No, we certainly never encouraged them to gamble more or to draw more money.

Understanding the nature of addiction and a gambling addiction in particular, is very helpful definitely.

You are working in an energetic and vibrant environment and you need to be able to pick up the tell-tale signs of a gambling disorder”.

Sometimes, but they often hate the client who abuses them and gets away with it.



Closing comment



There were always exceptions to the rules and good recruitment and training was a vital part of dealing effectively with such guests.

There were other factors which seemed to affect staff more negatively than these guests, such as working shifts, working weekends and public holidays, the time spent away from their families.

Shift work is often mentioned as an aggravating factor and has also been implicated in the gambling, substance use among gambling employees.

Causes isolation and restricts access to normal daytime activities.

Yet many gambling establishments are not open 24 hours a day - betting outlets and sports bars.

Staff appear to be just as vulnerable to the vagaries of gambling guests there.

Something that bears closer scrutiny because most studies done on this cohort (gambling employees) involve on the casino environment.

Conclusions

- Does the truth lie somewhere in the middle?
- Tolerance of abusive behaviour appears to vary according to position and could be linked to levels of training and experience.
- Staff are negatively affected by gamblers' behaviour and also act out by abusing substances and even gambling excessively. Risky sexual behaviour could be another off-shoot of this scenario.
- Dysfunctional levels of gambling appear to go hand in hand with unacceptable behaviour, which despite its impact on staff, is tolerated in order to increase revenue.
- The effects of working in such circumstances can be extra-ordinarily stressful, and can have physical and psychological impact on employees.

Effects of working in the gambling environment





ResearchGate

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/380418804>

Employee Stress and Stressors in Gambling and Hospitality Workplaces

Article in *Journal of Human Resources in Hospitality & Tourism* - April 2013

DOI: 10.1080/15332040.2013.792708

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Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:



NSW Gambling Prevalence Survey View project



The Coffs Harbour Innovation Farm Project View project



The analysis revealed

“that employment conditions, shift work, demanding work roles, emotional labour, patron interactions, uncertainty and lack of control, legal responsibilities, ethical concerns, and super-charged environments are key stressors for employees in gambling workplaces.”



You bet, I'm hungry

For a minority of players, excessive gambling can become a real problem. If you, or someone you care about needs help, call the NRGP toll free problem gambling counselling line on **0800 006 008** or email counsellor@responsiblegambling.co.za and a trained counsellor will help you. Expert confidential help available **free of charge**.

PLAYERS KNOW WHEN TO STOP
COUNSELLING LINE 0800 006 008

Some effects

Stress

Emotional labour

Exhaustion

Moodiness



Aggression and abuse

1. Gambling customers often become abusive and even aggressive when losing their money and then take it out on those nearest them at that time; the gambling staff (even cleaning staff).
2. Aggression, physical and verbal, a characteristic of addiction in general. Particularly also in gambling addiction, even though there is no substance involved, (although often clients are inebriated). Nothing creates more stress than the loss of money.
3. Withdrawal from a substance of abuse can make a person aggressive, irritable and moody. In this particular case, where we are discussing a process addiction, we are referring to the withdrawal from gambling.
4. In a gambling disorder, withdrawal symptoms are in the form of an irritable mood, restlessness and agitation, insomnia and headaches, which are relieved only once the gambling commences.
5. The anger and aggression staff generally deal with is that of desperation at having lost and also anger being projected at them for not being able to control themselves.

aggressive and abusive behaviour

- Harassment- shoving, finger pointing, sexual
- Assault- kicking, punching, hitting
- Suicide threats
- Destruction of property, throwing things
- **Swearing- verbal abuse**
- Invading personal space
- Agitation
- Belittling and putdowns
- Argumentative
- Violence



Effects of verbal abuse

1. Chronic pain
2. Headaches and migraines
3. Fear and anxiety
4. Depression
5. PTSD
6. Appetite disturbance
7. Sleep disturbance
8. Irritability and anger
9. Stammering
10. Alcohol and drug abuse
11. Self harm
12. Suicide



Emotional Labour

“challenges associated with dealing with difficult customers, where ‘there is a lot of stress in the industry when people are being asked to be polite, to be nice to clients, and it is not a reciprocal thing.’

Another explained that ‘they would have to be working with some highly demanding people or difficult situations, and usually there is alcohol involved, and certainly if it is a gambling related issue - it may be because they’ve lost their rent money or their whole pay - there are a lot of high emotions involved in that work.’ ”

Effects of emotional labour

Guilt, anger, resentment, the pain of being in a moral dilemma, sadness and more gravely: “a sense of powerlessness, disillusionment, alienation and despair” (Cooper, Drewe & O’Driscoll, 2001; Edelman & Mandle, 2010).

Emotional labour is what you do to try to avoid the abuse and manage the unmanageable. This exacts emotional and physical tolls, which can become chronic. This can result “irritability, moodiness and exhaustion after work, along with sleep and appetite problems” (Keith et al. 2001).

Moodiness, Anxiety and depression

Boring to stressful environment.

Close interaction with the gambling guest can result in a abusive or conflictual exchange.

Employees are affected by the mood of gamblers and become irritable and angry themselves

Artificial, noisy, smoky environment - conducive to increased anxiety.

I observed high levels of anxiety among staff in training sessions as well as heard stories which described situations which were anxiety provoking. Abusive situations in particular and a sense of powerlessness and frustration.

Related to the levels of substance abuse and other risky activities. The tendency to party hard after long shifts in an effort to unwind and de-stress appears to be a feature of this kind of work and speaks to how anxiety-provoking it is.

Levels of depression created or triggered by the close interaction with gambling addicts is not proven, but given all the other dysfunctional aspects of the work on both physical and psychological levels, incidence of depression might well be higher among this cohort.

Suicidal ideation

A casino manager witnessed a gambling guest shooting himself in the parking lot outside the casino.

Our helpline counsellors would screen every gambling caller for suicidal ideation.

Dealing with suicidal threats is traumatic and abusive and something which is a feature of personal relationships with an person suffering from an SUD as well.

Not heard of any gambling employee committing suicide as a **direct** result of working in this environment. Further research might prove otherwise.

Relationships that go beyond the professional

- Correlation to the personal relationship with a person who has an addictive disorder - staff tend to develop relationships with the guests, because of the long periods of time spent together .
- “staff build relationships with people in venues and it can be pretty hard when they see someone who they perceive to be in trouble, and they get frustrated not being able to do something about it” (Hing & Breen, 2003). Another comment in the Hing and Breen study was: “Around the TAB it is bizarre; they develop a relationship with the regulars”.
- Recriminations levelled directly at the employee or through the employee at the establishment. can reach a level of abusiveness that can be frightening, unpleasant, uncomfortable and shattering to the nerves.
- Staff members talk of being reduced to tears by a client and carrying the shock and anger around with them for days. They harbour resentment towards the client and the client knows and realizes this. Once the crisis has passed, gambling customers will typically try to make amends for their boorish behaviour by appearing to be extra “friendly” or by tipping the employee. And so the employee is kept on an emotional roller coaster.
- Feeling angry and resentful and then being expected to forgive and forget. This was a familiar story and it is familiar territory when we consider personal relationships which are abusive as a result of addiction.

Trauma

- staff on shift describe finding same customer still sitting in front of a slot machine more than twelve hours after they had knocked off from work and then returned. In the same clothes, not having slept or eaten. Some gamblers stay in the casino for days on end. The visible deterioration of gambling customers hand in hand with a emotional deterioration can traumatise staff as they were left to witness this process and yet could do very little about it.
- Newer and younger employees have not yet hardened themselves to the darker aspects of this working environment. They were often shocked, repulsed and saddened at the same time.
- These initial reactions can transform into disgust, anger and eventually resignation and cynicism. A distancing and a kind of hardened bitterness.
- They numb themselves to the devastation that customers engage in and only if really provoked do they reveal underlying anger and resentment.

Substance use

Work often leads to “the uptake of health risk activities, such as gambling, drinking and smoking” (Hing & Breen, 2005).

I was told by a gentleman, in his early forties, that he left the casino to go and work for one of the provincial gambling authorities, just to get away from the partying, which was a pervasive culture and feature of working in the casino.

A regular way of unwinding was a combination of alcohol and gambling. One noted that:

“they probably drink more and drink more often.’, while another speculated that ‘if they were to have a...drink after work, that could increase the likelihood that they could gamble’. Another interviewee told of a client who ‘would associate relaxing with drinking, and drinking with gambling; relaxing would mean drinking and gambling.” (Hing & Breen).

This tendency to increase use in substances, especially alcohol, as a way of unwinding after a stressful shift, is referred to in the second interview with Barbara Booyens.

During my training interventions, staff were not that forthright about their drinking habits.

Studies indicate that **gambling, drinking and smoking are common among employees.**

Survey of croupiers in Macau, revealed **“over 5 % of the respondents drank more than three glasses of alcohol a day, 24 % smoked cigarettes, 12 % took addictive substances, 14 % gambled in the past 7 days”** (Sydney et. al, 2013).

Substance use and gambling appears to be a way of coping with a stressful work environment.

Gambling

Studies focus on this kind of risky behaviour. Hing and Breen's 2005 study: "Gambling amongst gaming venue employees" found that:

"staff certainly are at risk for problem gambling, which "stems from a variety of factors related to working in a gambling environment".

Another study found that **"the rate of pathological gambling", "found to be 20.3%, compared to 1.14% for the general adult population" (Duquette, 2000).**

Now known as a severe gambling disorder, it's DSM- V.

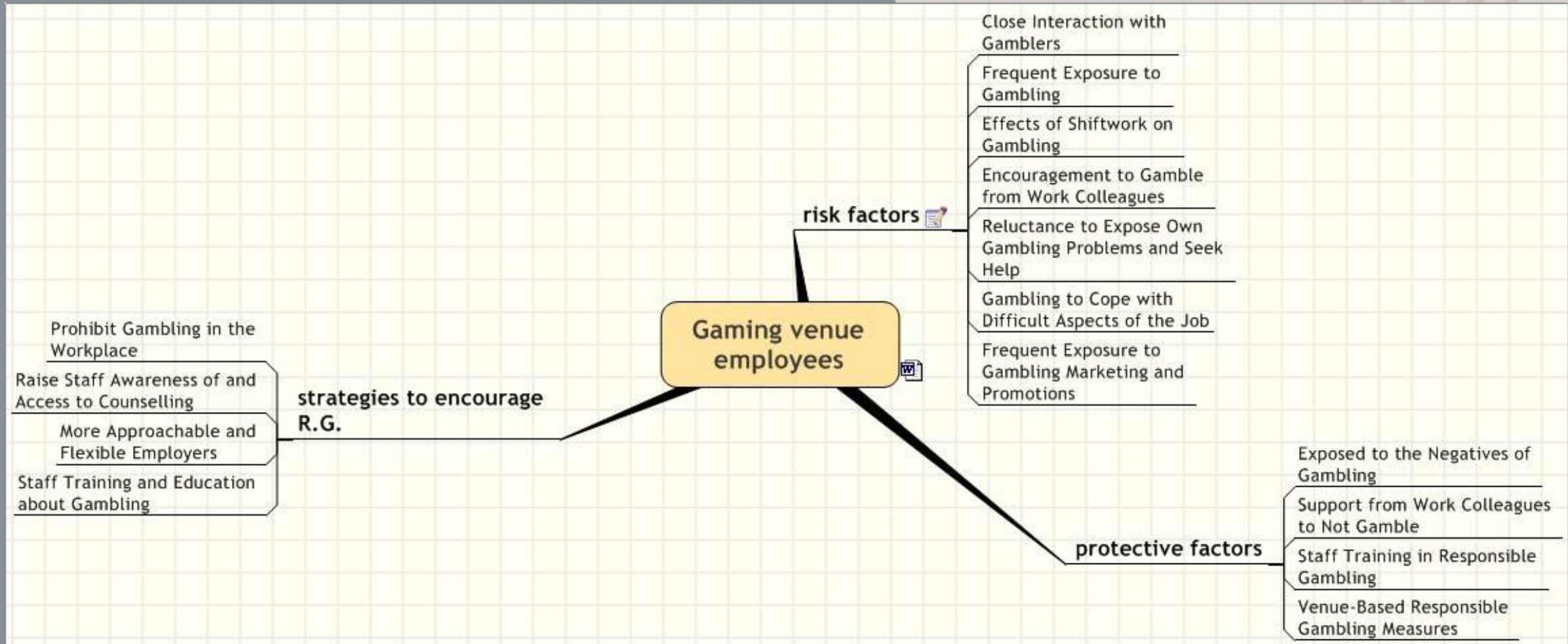
1999 study, "examined the prevalence of pathological gambling, drinking, smoking and other health risk behaviours amongst casino employees".

Found a higher prevalence of past year level 3 (pathological) gambling, but a lower prevalence of level 2 (problem) gambling.

Anecdotally, study by Hing and Breen was partly initiated by an interview with a casino croupier who claimed that between **"20-30% of that casino's gaming staff 'would have gambling problems they can't control'".**

While it would appear to be common sense that observing clients lose money, would cause staff to steer clear of any kind of gambling, many risk factors make this cohort particularly susceptible and at risk for gambling:

Risk factors for gambling



Relevant risk factors

1. Stress about gamblers -A moral dilemma
2. Emotional labour
3. Drinking culture can lead to cross addiction

Other risk factors

1. Job dissatisfaction,
2. Shift work,
3. Boredom
4. Low pay
5. Access to cash.
6. Industry attracts gamblers and outgoing people
7. Managers gambling
8. Staff gambling together
9. Normalizes gambling, especially heavy gambling.
10. Identifying with gamblers
11. Believing they have insider knowledge
12. Familiar environment

Impact on financial well-being

The extent to which presence of increased gambling and substance use occurs, in particular alcohol use, is the extent that we could assume some economic and social impact.

Further research to determine the extent of this would be needed.

- Naude study concluded that: **“Three important findings have been made, namely that casino employees’ drinking behaviour has an impact on their economic and family domain, meaning the more casino employees drink, the more money they spend and the worse off their economic situation gets and the less time gets spent with family members.”**
- Unless the employee is suffering financial loss as a result of gambling and or substance use themselves, the employee is less likely to suffer financially because their economical welfare is not directly linked to that of the gambler, which would be the case if the gambler or person with addiction issues was your spouse or family member.
- In terms of this characteristic, there appears to be less of a correlation between gambling employees and the partners or family members of people with addiction.

The moral dilemma

Another stressor experienced by gambling staff. Sub-theme of “Stress about problem gamblers” in Hing and Breen study.

Highlights ethical and moral dilemma: “(S)’seeing people with gambling problems, frustration at their inability to help them, dealing with patrons upset over losses, **and guilt over encouraging patrons to gamble**” which impacts employees.

Young woman, just given birth, stuck in front of a slot machine.

Employees more prone to feel ambivalence or moral frustration and powerlessness in cases like this, due to its poignancy and the involvement of a vulnerable party.

Phenomenon of elderly women EC & Swaziland, addicted to gambling and regularly play out their full grant or pension money.



“I wanted to see more of my grandkids, but not by moving into their livingroom”

A gambling problem hurts. It doesn't have to be that way.
CALL OUR TOLL FREE COUNSELLING LINE 0800 006 008
or send a “please call me” or sms to 076 675 0710.
counsellor@responsiblegambling.co.za

WINNERS KNOW WHEN TO STOP



The background features a light grey base with large, overlapping organic shapes in muted green and brown. A white silhouette of a pine branch is visible in the upper left. A white wavy line curves across the bottom right.

Protective Factors

NIRGP news

NATIONAL RESPONSIBLE GAMBLING PROGRAMME



Training

Training

- Level 1 Responsible Gambling Training
- Level 2 training covering information given here, with regard to the effects of working in the gambling environment.
- Motivational Interviewing training
- Gambling regulators
- Effects of training can be over-estimated, especially with regard to employees' own vulnerability to gambling (Hing & Breen, 2005).
- Typically, employees would comment that our training should be aimed at the gambling guests and not at them!

The Three C's

These lessons the employee starts to learn either through their own experience and if they are fortunate, these concepts will be taught.

These concepts are very helpful in a personal relationship with a person who has an addictive disorder. And they could be helpful to the gambling employee.

Understanding the nature of addiction.

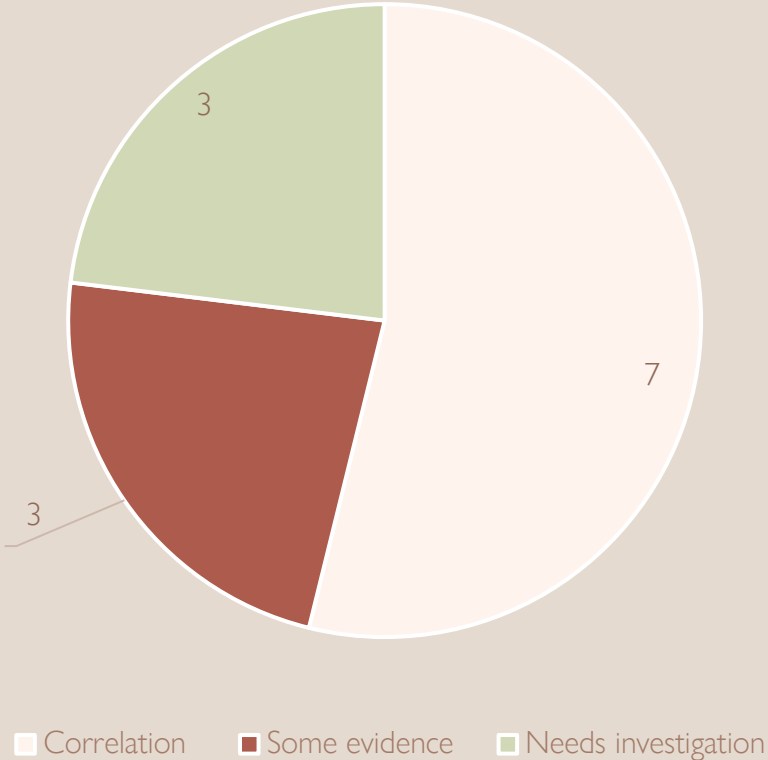
You didn't
CAUSE
it

You can't
CONTROL
it

You can't
CURE
it

Is there a correlation?

Correlation with living with a person who is addicted



Tentative results

CORRELATIONS

- Trauma
- Anxiety
- Abuse
- Manipulation
- Anger and irritability
- Substance use and other addictions like gambling
- Exhaustion and poor sleeping patterns

SOME EVIDENCE

- Negative health impacts
- Depression
- Co-dependency

NEEDS INVESTIGATION

- Financial loss
- Irrational behaviour and thoughts
- Denial and minimization of the effects of working in the gambling industry.

In conclusion

It appears that there is a strong correlation between the effects suffered by family members of people with an addictive disorder and employees working in a gambling environment in direct contact with gambling guests.

This highlights the toxicity of this working environment and indicates the need for ameliorating strategies.

Recommendation

Implement strategies used for the family members living with people with substance issues, including the 5- Step Method in an appropriate format.

Further research on this cohort

Consistent support from management,
Effective training and commitment to responsible gambling policies.



A big thank you to AFINET

And Prof Richard Velleman



thank you



Natalie Bossi
Addiction Counsellor

bossi@telkomsa.net
084 547 2804

 Find us on Facebook: Addiction Counselling