



Police awareness and practice regarding gambling related harms



Commission on Crime & Gambling Related Harms

Key points

- Gambling harms and addiction are understood to lead to crime being committed in a number of ways (Ramanauskas, 2020:15). Though most commonly linked to acquisitive crime, a growing body of evidence explores the links to other types of crime including violent interpersonal offences.
- A focus on police awareness and practice stems from developing understanding about criminal justice awareness, as well as knowledge of good practice at the police station. The police custody suite is a significant engagement point, not only with the criminal justice system, but with other health and social services and in particular Liaison and Diversion (L&D) staff.
- Responses to Freedom of Information (FOI) requests submitted to police forces in England and Wales showed that almost a fifth conducted screening for gambling harms and addiction in custody suites. There were varied screening programmes and support pathways in place.
- A further 39 per cent of police forces illustrated some awareness of gambling harms and addiction, for example through general assessment of needs and vulnerability, or support information.
- Information received about recorded crimes illustrated the range of offences related to gambling harms and addiction. Forty-five per cent of recorded crimes were categorised as violence against the person; 24 per cent acquisitive crimes; and 8 per cent arson and criminal damage.
- Evidence from Modus Operandi (MO) texts and case study interviews illustrate the range of gambling related crime, who the victims may be, and contextual factors including drug and alcohol addiction, and poverty.
- There needs to be improved awareness of gambling harms and addiction, and the diverse range of gambling related crime. Within police custody, this should involve inclusion within L&D service specification, a streamlined approach to identification and referral, and the use of existing resources (e.g. as developed by the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (APCC)). Enhanced awareness and an outlined approach to gambling related harms should be included in Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) strategies and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) vulnerabilities assessments.

Background

Gambling behaviour, and harm, exists on a spectrum which can range from recreational activity to addiction. Described as 'varied and diffuse' (Langham et al, 2016), gambling harm extends beyond a diagnosis of or screening for gambling addiction, to wider, negative, consequences in all aspects of life. Gambling harms can encompass both immediate and longer-term impacts on finances, relationships, emotional/psychological wellbeing, health, culture, employment, education, and criminal activity (ibid.). In 2020 the Commission on Crime and Gambling Related Harms published a literature review which found that the links between crime and gambling harms were complex and not fully understood, particularly in the domestic context (Ramanauskas, 2020). Despite this limited evidence base, the research indicates that gambling harms are not only linked to acquisitive crimes such as theft and fraud in order to fund gambling (See: Banks, 2018; Brown, 1987; Brooks and Blaszczyński, 2011; Ramanauskas, 2020), but also to interpersonal crimes such as domestic abuse and child neglect (see: Banks, 2018; McCorkle, 2002; Smith et al, 2003; Suomi et al, 2013; Dowling et al, 2016; Roberts et al, 2016; Lahn and Grabosky, 2003; Williams et al, 2005; Breen et al, 2013; Cuadrado and Lieberman, 2011). Gambling related harms may also be present alongside other additions or vulnerabilities which lead to crime (Ramanauskas, 2020:15). How this is understood has implications for awareness, identification, and support at the police station and other criminal justice services.

The rationale behind this research relates to emerging knowledge about the broader range of gambling related crime, exploring how engagement with the criminal justice system can serve to mitigate, de-escalate and support, starting with the police. The research builds on examples of good practice, such as the screening and referral pathway developed by Beacon Counselling Trust and Cheshire Constabulary in 2017. The police custody suite is a significant engagement point, not only with the criminal justice system but with other health and social services. As well as serving a detention and investigatory purpose, staff in police custody suites are also responsible for assessing an individual's needs and vulnerabilities including mental and physical health, and risks and vulnerabilities including (but not limited to) addictions, financial issues, housing, relationship and family issues, and domestic violence. Where a need or vulnerability is identified, Liaison

and Diversion (L&D) assessment should be sought, presenting opportunities for diversion from custodial sentences. Gambling harms are increasingly being recognised as a public health issue due to their wide ranging impact (The Lancet, 2021; Public Health England, 2021) which has further implications regarding where the impetus on, and responsibility for, gambling related harms lies.

Aims

This research seeks to explore police understanding of gambling related harms and crime, and how police forces in England and Wales operationalise this understanding in their daily practice. In doing so, it also provides a window onto the broader picture of the nature of gambling related harm and crime in this jurisdiction. It also aims to highlight the role of police custody as criminal justice gatekeepers; to share good practice; and finally, to challenge narratives about the nature of gambling related crime.

Methodology

Freedom of Information (FOI) requests were issued to understand awareness and practice among police forces in England and Wales, including the British Transport Police. The requests covered:

- Existing screening and treatment practices for gambling related harms and addiction.
- Information about incidents recorded between 1 January 2019 and 31 December 2020 involving gambling harm and addiction.
- Information about crimes recorded between 1 January 2019 and 31 December 2020 with the key word 'gambling' (to mitigate for results based on location proximity).

In addition, interviews were conducted with representatives from four different police forces (Cheshire Constabulary, Cleveland Police, Devon and Cornwall Police and an anonymous force), as well as national L&D programme implementation leads. These case studies were sought to illustrate examples of best practice and provide more nuanced information about the work, experiences, and insights of police, criminal justice, and L&D practitioners.

Findings

Screening

The College of Policing (2020) and L&D service specification (2019) require that detainees are assessed for risks or vulnerabilities in custody, prior to L&D engagement. However, identification and referral mechanisms differ between forces. The findings showed that action/responsibility was taken by custody officers in nine forces, by L&D services in six forces, and was a joint process in ten forces.

Nine of the 44 forces in England and Wales (around 20 per cent) reported that they screened systematically for gambling harms and addiction in custody suites. The people screened, and the triggers for screening varied as did the screening tools used, including GAST-G and PGSI.¹

A range of partner and support organisations were utilised to refer or signpost people to local and national specialist gambling services and more general support services for addictions and financial problems.

Eighteen forces (around 41 per cent) reported that they did not conduct any kind of screening for gambling harms and did not display any kind of awareness.

Seventeen forces (around 39 per cent) did not screen systematically but had some awareness of gambling harms. They reported that gambling related harms might be identified through a general assessment of needs and vulnerabilities undertaken either during a custody risk assessment or by L&D. Some of these forces also provided leaflet information either on booking in or release regarding support for gambling harms.

The case studies illustrated the different ways in which screening, and support pathways could be developed and implemented, but also consensus around a lack of appropriate local services, challenges in identifying gambling harms and addiction, and the need for holistic assessment.

‘... personally, I don’t think gambling is something that screams out straight away and people are open about straight away, it’s not until you start picking up other elements of what is going on that you identify that.’
(Case study interview)

The interviews also highlighted a tension in the custody environment regarding where responsibility should lie (i.e. custody or L&D staff) for identifying gambling harms and addictions.

L&D involvement and the acknowledgement of the importance of holistic and healthcare-based response served to both reflect and support the argument to consider gambling harms as a public health issue.

FOI responses and case study interviews suggested that organisation-wide and system-wide awareness training was needed to ensure that the issue of gambling related harm was embedded.

Recorded crimes

Information received about recorded crimes was used to explore the types of offences related to gambling harm and addiction. These can be categorised as:

Violence against the person

The largest number of recorded crimes fell under the category violence against person, representing 45 per cent of the data. The largest subcategories were: violence without injury at 21 per cent of all recorded crimes (including crimes such as threats to kill, cruelty to children and racially or religiously aggravated assault); violence with injury at 12 per cent (including crimes such as assault); and stalking and harassment at 10 per cent (including crimes such as malicious communications and controlling or coercive behaviour, encompassing domestic abuse).

This supports a growing body of evidence illustrating the link between gambling harms and addiction, and violent crimes (Williams et al, 2005; Breen et al, 2013; Cuadrado and Lieberman, 2011; GamCare, 2019) and domestic abuse (Roberts et al 2016; Roberts et al, 2020; Dowling et al, 2016).

FOI data coupled with Modus Operandi (MO) text illustrated the broad range of violent offence types, and circumstances surrounding the arrest including

¹ Gambling addiction and gambling harms are identified using self-report screening tools, which vary within and across services and jurisdictions. These screening tools assess gambling behaviour and activity, and related harm to the individual and their wider networks, asking the respondent to score themselves on a series of statements based on their experiences over the previous 12 months.

greater propensity to anger, frustration, and gambling harm and addiction as a cause and response to negative emotional states or relationships. MO text and case study interviews also highlighted the links with other social vulnerabilities including poverty or drug and alcohol addiction.

'AP [aggrieved person] and partner enter into verbal argument over male spending victims' money on gambling. This angers victim due to bills that need to be paid. Male grabs victim to the throat causing no injury.' (Offence type: violence without injury)

'Male offender who has a gambling problem engaged in a verbal argument with his aunty-the argument escalated with aunty being pushed and kicked on the head and offender making off.' (Offence type: violence with injury)

'Offenders expose AP and siblings to emotional harm and neglect due to the mothers drinking and gambling and father drinking and explosive temper.' (Offence type: cruelty to children)

'Offender has called and text AP on numerous occasions, sometimes up to 30 times a day asking for money to fund gambling and alcohol addictions. Offender threatens to harm or kill himself when he does not get money from the AP. Offender will use withheld numbers when AP blocks his number.' (Offence type: harassment)

Acquisitive crimes

Theft accounted for 24 per cent of recorded crimes in the data received. Within this category, sub-categories included: other theft at 17 per cent (including blackmail and theft by an employee); theft from the person at 2 per cent; and shoplifting and bicycle theft, both at less than 1 per cent of recorded crimes. Robbery constituted 1 per cent of recorded crimes in the data received, and burglary (domestic and commercial, the majority being commercial) constituted 6 per cent. Fraud represented 1 per cent of recorded crimes in the data received.

A wealth of existing research confirms the relationship between gambling harms and addiction and acquisitive crime (Brown, 1987; Brooks and Blaszczynski, 2011; Turner et al, 2009; Ledgerwood et al, 2007; Smith and Simpson, 2014; Lahn and Grabosky, 2003).

Evidence from the MO texts and case study interviews, however, suggests that acquisitive gambling related crime does not always follow the same pattern as often characterised (i.e. large-scale theft and fraud, often committed against employers). Rather, cases evident in the research findings are lower-level and often committed against friends and family.

'We would be doing a disservice if all we looked at were the obvious theft and fraud, we need to look at, with an open mind, things that aren't always obvious.' (Case study interview)

'Offender steals the phone and bank card belonging to the aggrieved which she had lost. Offender then uses the bank card on online gambling sites.' (Offence type: other theft)

'Offender who is the son of the A/P and a gambling addict has taken A/P's debit card and used it to place bets online on BETFRED to the value of £1270.' (Offence type: theft in a dwelling)

'Inf states ex-partner has stolen £600 from their 11 month old son's money box, inf has confronted and he has denied doing this. Unknown when this could have taken place, money was from a christening, but they have only been split up for 5 days. Male was alone in house has a bad gambling habit where he has found himself in thousands of pounds in debt. He has previously stolen from inf, his grandparents and used peoples' credit cards/debit cards. This has never been reported, usually kept in the family. No burglary at the address, nobody else has a key.' (Offence type: other theft)

Other crime types

Several other crime types were recorded in the data provided. More frequently occurring types included arson and criminal damage (8 per cent), sexual offences (4 per cent), miscellaneous crimes against society (4 per cent), public order offences (3 per cent), drugs offences (2 per cent), vehicle offences (1 per cent), and possession of weapons (less than 1 per cent).

'Offender enters betting shop to gamble. After approx. 2 hours of gambling offender loses £20 and becomes very aggressive and takes out anger by picking up stool and smashing 4x betting machines causing extensive damage.' (Offence type: other criminal damage) (MO text)

Victims of gambling related crime included current and former intimate partners, children, wider family members, and employers. These established relationships could impact on reporting and criminal justice outcomes in charging or prosecution.

Evidence from the MO texts and case study interview also suggests that co-morbidities such as drug and alcohol addiction may be present, as well as wider rippled effects of gambling related harm and crime on family, friends, and networks.

'Has developed an addiction to cannabis and has also formed a gambling habit. He has attended his father address and contacted him wanting to borrow money. He also contacted his father via text and mobile wanting to stay at the address. His father no longer wants to have contact with the offender.'
(Offence type: other criminal damage)

Recommendations

General

- A wider awareness of gambling related crime, harm and addiction is needed across society. It should not fall to the police or criminal justice system to identify it and provide support.
- Gambling harm should be considered through a public health approach.

Understanding and awareness training

- The idea or perception of what gambling related crime is or looks like needs to be broadened.
- There needs to be a recognition of the fact that gambling related harm exists on a spectrum. Awareness of the nuanced scale of gambling harm and crime facilitates different opportunities to support and de-escalate before, during, and after engagement with the police.
- Police custody and L&D staff should receive training about the nature and nuances of gambling related harms and the links to crime.

- Awareness training is integral to enabling police and L&D practitioners to understand and identify gambling related harm, crime and addiction. This should be nationwide and force wide (i.e. not just for police custody suite staff).

Screening and support

- Police (and other criminal justice agencies) should explore and learn from best practice regarding the mode and location of screening. They should consider whether direct screening, or holistic assessment (or a combination of both), is most effective (and supportive to the individual) in identifying gambling harm.

Police practice and policy

- Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) engagement is welcome. In addition to adopting the advice of and toolkit developed by the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (APCC), PCCs should incorporate screening and support pathways for gambling harms within their strategic plans.
- L&D models/processes should be assessed. A streamlined approach may ensure more equitable access to screening and support or treatment. Gambling harms should be included in the L&D service specification eligibility criteria.
- Support and treatment should be readily available across all geographic areas.
- Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) should include gambling in their vulnerabilities assessments and inspections of police forces and wider partnerships.

Future research

- Future research is needed into criminal justice outcomes after the police station, and in linking this to crime types.
- Further research of lived experience (for example in the custody suite) would be beneficial in assessing the best practice models.

- Additional research is needed into the demographics of people affected by gambling harms and crime, as well as the links between demographics, crime type, and outcomes.
- A full and consistent data set is needed for this to occur.
- Prevalence information is needed. Stakeholders should consider the most appropriate and efficient ways to elicit prevalence information from the police (and other criminal justice agencies) and work together to enable this data collection.

References

Banks, J. (2018), A taxonomy of gambling-related crime, available at: <https://shura.shu.ac.uk/23598/5/Banks-ATaxonomyOf%20&28AM%29.pdf> (accessed 26/01/2021).

Breen, H., Hing, N. and Gordon, A. (2013), 'Indigenous Australian gambling crime and possible interventions: a qualitative study', *Asian Journal of Gambling Issues and Public Health*, 3:4.

Brooks, G. and Blaszczynski, A. (2011), 'Judicial decisions on cases involving problem gambling and crime in England and Wales', *International Gambling Studies*, 11(1):81–92.

Brown, R.I.F. (1987), 'Pathological gambling and associated patterns of crime: Comparisons with alcohol and other drug addictions', *Journal of Gambling Studies*, 3:98–114.

College of Policing (2020), *Authorised Professional Practice, Detention and custody: Detainee care*, available at: <https://www.app.college.police.uk/app-content/detention-and-custody-2/detainee-care/> (accessed 26/01/2022).

Cuadrado, M. and Lieberman, L. (2011), 'Use of a short gambling screen with an arrestee population: A feasibility study', *Journal of Gambling Studies*, 28(2):193–205.

Dowling, N., Suomi, A., Jackson, A., Lavis, T., Patford, J., Cockman, S., Thomas, S., Bellringer, M., Koziol-McLain, J., Battersby, M., Harvey, P., Abbott, M., (2016), *Problem Gambling and Intimate Partner Violence: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis, Trauma Violence Abuse*, 17(1):43–61.

GamCare (2019), *Evidence report to the Howard League for Penal Reform Commission on Crime and Problem Gambling*, available at: <https://howardleague.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/GamCare-Report-Evidence-Submission-to-Howard-League-Commission.pdf> (accessed 26/01/2022).

Lahn, J., and Grabosky, P. (2003), *Gambling and clients of ACT (Australian Capital Territory) corrections: Final report*, Centre for Gambling Research: Australian National University.

The Lancet Public Health (2021), *Gambling: a neglected public health issue*, 6:1, available at: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667\(20\)30290-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667(20)30290-5) (accessed 01/02/2022).

Ledgerwood, D., Weinstock, J., Marasco, B. and Petry, N. (2007) 'Clinical features and treatment prognosis of pathological gamblers with and without recent gambling-related illegal behavior', *Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law*, 35(3):294–301.

McCorkle, R. (2002), *Pathological Gambling in Arrestee Populations, Final report*, National Institute of Justice, US Department of Justice, 1–92.

NHS (2019), *Liaison and Diversion Standard Service Specification 2019*, available at: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/national-liaison-and-diversion-service-specification-2019.pdf> (accessed 26/01/2022).

Public Health England (2021), *Gambling-related harms: evidence review*, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/gambling-related-harms-evidence-review> (accessed 01/02/2022).

Ramanauskas, S. (2020), *Crime and Problem Gambling: A Research Landscape*, available at: <https://howardleague.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Crime-and-problem-gambling-research-landscape.pdf> (accessed 26/01/2022).

Roberts, A., Coid, J., King, R., Murphy, R., Turner, J., Bowden-Jones, H., Du Preez, K. P., Landon, J. (2016), *Gambling and violence in a nationally representative sample of UK men. Addiction*. 111(12):2196–2207.

Smith, G. and Simpson, R. (2014), 'Gambling Addiction Defence on Trial: Canadian Expert Witness Perspectives', *International Journal of Criminology and Sociology*, 3:319–326.

Smith, G. J., Wynne, H. and Hartnagel, T. F. (2003), 'Examining police records to assess gambling impacts: A study of gambling-related crime in the city of Edmonton: A study prepared for The Alberta Gaming Research Institute. Edmonton, AB: Alberta Gaming Research Institute.

Suomi, A., Jackson, A.C., Dowling, N.A. et al (2013), Problem gambling and family violence: family member reports of prevalence, family impacts and family coping, Asian Journal of Gambling Issues and Public Health, 3:13.

Turner, N.E., Preston, D.L., Saunders, C., McAvoy, S., Jain, U. (2009), 'The relationship of problem gambling to criminal behaviour in a sample of Canadian male federal offenders', Journal of Gambling Studies, 25(2):153–169.

Williams, R., Royston, J. and Hagen, B. (2005), 'Gambling and problem gambling within forensic populations: A review of the literature', Criminal Justice and Behaviour, 32(6), 665–689.

About the Howard League for Penal Reform

The Howard League for Penal Reform is a national charity working for less crime, safer communities and fewer people in prison. We campaign and research on a wide range of issues including short-term prison sentences, real work in prison, community sentences and youth justice. We work with parliament and the media, with criminal justice professionals, students and members of the public, influencing debate and forcing through meaningful change to create safer communities.

Our legal team provides free, independent and confidential advice, assistance and representation on a wide range of issues to young people aged 21 and under who are in prisons or secure children's homes and centres. By becoming a member, you will give us a bigger voice and give vital financial support to our work. We cannot achieve real and lasting change without your help.

Please visit www.howardleague.org and join today.

About the Commission on Crime and Gambling Related Harms

The Commission on Crime and Gambling Related Harms was launched by the Howard League for Penal Reform in 2019. The Chair of the Commission is Lord Peter Goldsmith QC. He leads a team of 12 Commissioners, comprising of academics and professionals with expertise in the criminal justice system and public health, as well as experts with knowledge of the gambling industry and with lived experience of addiction. The Commission seeks to answer three questions:

- What are the links between crime and gambling harms?
- What impact do these links have on communities and society?
- What should be done?

Howard League for Penal Reform

1 Ardleigh Road
London
N1 4HS

t 020 7249 7373
e info@howardleague.org
w www.howardleague.org
@TheHowardLeague

Company limited by guarantee
No. 898514
Registered charity
No. 251926

2022

ISBN 978-1-911114-70-3



9 781911 114703 >

ISBN 978-1-911114-70-3