

STRESS & PRODUCTIVITY IN HOSPITALITY & GAMBLING WORKPLACES

Ms Margaret Tiyce, Professor Nerilee Hing, Dr Grant Cairncross & Dr Helen Breen (presenter)
Centre for Gambling Education & Research
Southern Cross University, Australia.

Financial assistance was provided by the QLD Office of Regulatory Policy under their Responsible Gambling Research Grants Scheme



Research Aims

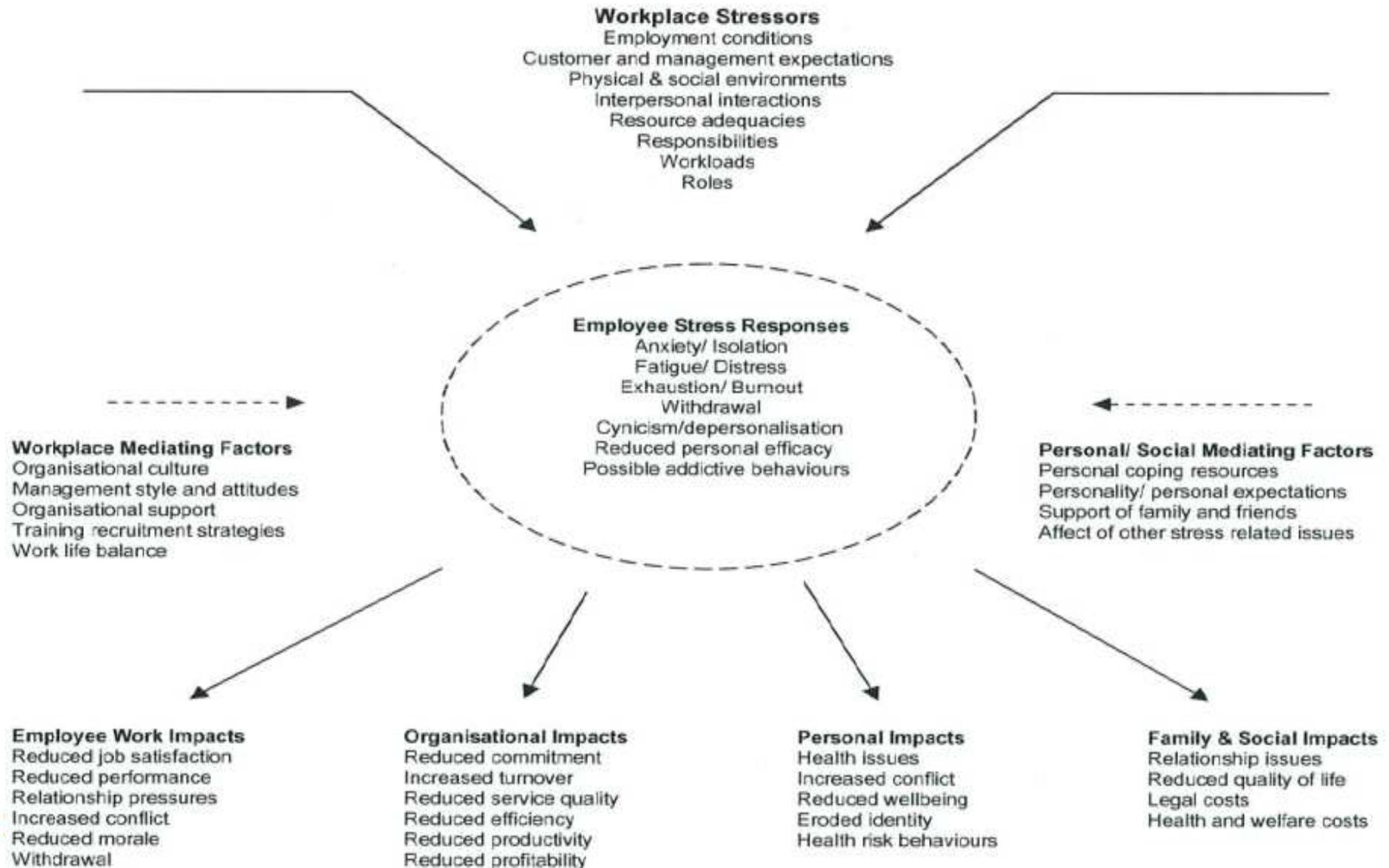
- To identify workplace factors/stressors that contribute to employee stress in gambling workplaces,
- To compare gambling workplace stressors with those in hospitality generally.

Background

Gambling employee research:

- Early research - limited to several Nth. American studies.
- Recent research - still limited, mostly conducted in Macau & Canada.
- Australian research - little research into how working in a gambling venue might contribute to employee stress, the nature of those stresses, or how stressors might differ from other hospitality workplaces.
- Part of a larger project, an exploratory qualitative study which was informed by multiple stakeholder interviews – 86 employees, 73 managers, 6 problem gamblers, 2 industry associations, 1 union organisation, 32 counsellors and 1 legal service.

Key Features of the Work Stress Process



Interviews

20-40 minute semi-structured face-to-face interviews in 5 regions of Queensland, with 165 managers & employees:

- 81 from clubs
- 44 from hotels
- 40 from casinos

Interview schedule:

- Experiences of working in gambling venues,
- Behavior & gambling as influenced by various aspects of work (roles, responsibilities, customer interactions, work relationships, environment & conditions)
- Brief questionnaire about own gambling.

Thematic analysis

Employee stressors in gambling workplaces – employment condition results

“If I was paid better and thought that the company was going to look after me in the future, give me a career path. ...[There is a] feeling of hopelessness, for example with property prices, I would never be able to buy my own home”.

- Low pay and rewards
- Low promotion or career prospects
- Lack of job security
- Unpredictable rostering
- Lack of autonomy
- Lack of predictable days off
- Lack of regular holidays
- Management inconsistencies & conflict
- High turnover
- Lack of alternative employment opportunities

Employee stressors in gambling workplaces – shift work results

“You work to 2.30 am, won’t go to sleep until 4 am and by the time you get up you have lost half your Sunday or it’s gone. I can’t participate in normal activities – family barbeques, etc. Add to that the lack of regular holidays. ... Shift work and uncertainty can have horrible effects on relationships”.

- Lack of social life, social isolation
- Need to fill in time between shifts
- Work schedules conflicting with family responsibilities
- Work schedules conflicting with social opportunities
- Work schedules conflicting with leisure opportunities
- Work schedules conflicting with need for sleep & rest
- Interruption to biorhythms
- Undermines work life balance

Employee stressors in gambling workplaces – work role results

“Everyone is under stress when you work in a [gambling] venue, that’s just the nature of the thing. There are lots of rules ... lots of pressure. Staff do not have a lot of control over their work, and a lack of control generates stress”.

- Long hours and demanding work
- Heavy unpredictable workloads
- Fast pace of work environment
- Boring, monotonous, menial work
- Lack of meaning to the work
- Lack of control over work
- Inadequate training and support
- Personal safety issues

Employee stressors in gambling workplaces – responsibility results

“Staff are expected to encourage patrons to keep playing, by going and getting drinks... to keep patrons at a machine whenever they can, and it is stressful when they can see that a patron is stressed. ... That’s one of the stress factors for me. I would hate to meet someone who has a problem and I haven’t picked it up on it, or I worry that I’ve encouraged them to keep going ...”.

- Legal obligations for responsible service of alcohol
- Legal obligations for responsible service of gambling
- Heightened responsibility for patron welfare

Employee stressors in gambling workplaces – customer interaction results

“It can ruin lives and make people desperate ... the traumas they are putting their families through ... I have seen people lose their houses at the casino, lose their cars, and gambling has cost some of the patrons their marriage. ... A customer won \$10,000, cashed his chips in and was back straight away putting the money back on the table. This can make me feel frustrated”.

- Close interaction, familiarity with patrons
- Limited capacity to help patrons of concern
- Being a silent witness to harmful behaviour
- Role conflict
- Role ambiguity

Employee stressors in gambling workplaces – emotional labour results

“There is a lot of stress when people are being asked to be polite, to be nice to clients, and its not a reciprocal thing ... From personal experience it does get to you. Trying to be polite and have a big smile on your face 24/7 wears thin after a while”.

- Constantly having to be pleasant
- Conflicting emotions of staff & patrons
- Dealing with intoxicated patrons
- Dealing with emotional patrons
- Dealing with aggressive, argumentative, abusive behaviour
- Dealing with patron distress and life trauma

Employee stressors in gambling workplaces – uncertainty & lack of control

“If they are losing money, people get rude ... Most gamblers are very impatient people. They can be very abrupt ... get aggressive with the machines. I’m at the forefront, [when people] want to criticise, chastise, condemn, complain, scrutinise, it all comes to me”.

- Volatile customers
- Need for vigilance
- Emotionally charged environment
- Unpredictable patron behaviour

Employee stressors in gambling workplaces – ethical concerns

“The company doesn’t care about responsible gambling, they just want the money. They don’t care if the patron is down to their last dollar ... You see the same gamblers every day and nobody does anything about it. ... When it comes to practice on the floor, most of the rules go out the window. Most of the staff get annoyed by this”.

- Serving potentially harmful products
- Promoting gambling to patrons with gambling problems
- Limited ability to help patrons with gambling problems
- Profiting from patrons’ losses/ problems
- Frustration or depression over money gambled/wasted
- Conflict amongst management/staff/patron attitudes

Employee stressors in gambling workplaces – super charged environment

“The noise of the machines is very annoying ... a talking roulette wheel you can hear ... auditory stimuli jingling bells that go off continually ...the lights and whistles. I’ve been around it for a while, and I’m sick of it”.

- Artificial, bright, flashing lighting
- Loud, repetitive and irritating noises
- Hyped, stimulating environment
- Lack of natural light and fresh air

Conclusions

Specific workplace stressors for gaming employees:

- Coping with heightened emotions.
- Conflicting management/customer goals.
- Ethical & social concerns about gambling & responsible gambling.
- Conflicting social attitudes to gambling.
- Ambiguity for front line staff.
- Unique physical environment, often super-charged setting.

Implications for industry

- Regular monitoring of employee & workplace stress levels to improve job satisfaction & reduce staff turnover.
- Ensuring appropriate rewards.
- Introducing organisational training & support to bolster coping capacity & resilience.
- Providing employee assistance programs to extend skills & career paths.
- Addressing workplace risk by analyses of health & safety issues.
- Taking a strategic HR approach to improve motivation, service quality & organisational productivity.
- Productivity benefits should flow to employer organisations, employees, families & communities.