

RESEARCH ARTICLE

“They loved gambling more than me.” Women's experiences of gambling-related harm as an affected other

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Abstract

Background: Gambling poses a global threat to public health due to its far-reaching impacts. Research has demonstrated a ripple effect of harmful gambling on social network members and broader communities. While researchers have documented extreme harms associated with an affected other, limited research has qualitatively investigated how women describe their concerns about the gambling of a social network member, and any subsequent negative impacts on their own lives.

Methods: An online panel survey was conducted with women aged 18 years and older, who gambled at least once in the last 12 months, and resided in the Australian states of Victoria and New South Wales. This paper focused on the open text responses of a subsection of the sample ($n = 136$) who reported being negatively impacted by someone else's gambling. The study utilised reflexive thematic analysis to interpret the data.

Results: Results indicated that women were concerned about the gambling behaviours of a broad range of social network members. Open text responses regarding the nature of these concerns mostly related to individualised paradigms of gambling behaviour – including whether the participant perceived their network member could afford to gamble, was being responsible with their gambling, or were gambling too frequently. Participants experienced a range of negative impacts including significant financial issues, relationship difficulties, poorer emotional wellbeing as a result of worrying about the gambler, and loss of trust. Some described the negative experiences associated with growing up with a parent who gambled.

Conclusion: The research demonstrates the broad impacts of gambling on affected others. This study enhances our understanding of how women are harmed by gambling and considers the complexities of their experiences and relationships with the gambler. This extends knowledge beyond quantitative descriptors of harm among affected others and provides a critical reflection on the nuances of women's experiences with gambling and gambling harm.

KEYWORDS

affected other, gambling, gambling harm, public health, qualitative, women

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1 | INTRODUCTION

Gambling is recognised as a global public health threat that causes significant harm to individuals, families, and communities.¹⁻³ Gambling contributes to a range of negative health and social issues, including financial problems, addiction, physical and mental health issues,^{4,5} relationship difficulties,⁶ and family violence.^{7,8} There have been a range of proposed frameworks that have sought to conceptualise the extent and nature of gambling harm,^{9,10} and that have been used to guide the formulation of government policy.¹¹ These frameworks largely acknowledge that gambling harm involves any engagement in gambling that contributes to a range of negative health or social consequences for the gambler, or their family, social network members, or communities.^{9,10} However, as van Schalkwyk and colleagues [2021, p. e615]¹² argue, gambling exposure, use, and harms are complex, difficult to measure, take a range of forms, are constantly changing, and often co-occur with a range of other problems for individuals who already have vulnerable health and social circumstances.

There has been significant focus in the gambling literature on the individual experiences of 'problem' gamblers.¹³⁻¹⁵ It has been argued that this focus on individual gamblers has "*marginalised and concealed broader societal perspectives*" about gambling, including the impact of the gambling industry, their products and environments, and community experiences of harm [p. e615].¹² Recently, and in an effort to demonstrate the broader burden of gambling harm, there has been a focus on harms experienced by family and social network members, described in the literature as affected others.¹⁶⁻¹⁸ The harms experienced by affected others are not only as the result of problem gambling behaviours, but may also be associated with the low and moderate risk behaviours of a gambler.¹⁶ There is a recognised ripple effect of harmful gambling on social network members, including financial losses, domestic conflicts, and relationship complexities that partners have experienced.¹⁹

While international gambling research has demonstrated that both men and women may experience financial, emotional, and relationship harms as affected others,²⁰ women have been identified as being particularly vulnerable to a range of harms, including male partner and family related violence.²¹⁻²³ A recent prevalence study identified that the three most commonly reported negative impacts experienced by women as an affected other were: feeling distressed about the other person's gambling; feeling angry at the person for not controlling their gambling; and experiencing less enjoyment from time spent with people that they cared about.²⁴ What is missing from existing research are qualitative inquiries which consider the broader range of women's concerns about the gambling behaviours of both male and female members of their social networks, any impacts these gambling behaviours may have on their own lives, and public health strategies to respond. Researchers have highlighted the importance of gender transformative approaches in gambling research, which recognises gender as a critical influence on experiences of gambling, and aims to address health inequalities by exposing and challenging harmful gender stereotypes and norms associated with these experiences.²⁵ These approaches are important in understanding how

women conceptualise and experience a range of harms from gambling, including from someone else's gambling.^{25,26} To date, qualitative studies exploring women's experiences as affected others have mostly focused on the experiences of spouses or partners.^{19,22,27} To our knowledge, very limited research has investigated the experiences of women who are within the gambler's broader social network (for example as colleagues or friends), and who are also gamblers themselves. Understanding these perspectives is important, particularly given that researchers indicate that gamblers often view gambling harm as an issue associated with individual responsibility and control.^{28,29}

The aim of this paper was to understand how Australian female gamblers conceptualised their concerns about the gambling behaviours of someone in their social network, and the impacts of these behaviours on their own lives. The paper was guided by three research questions:

1. What are the range of concerns that women have about the gambling behaviours of someone in their social network?
2. What types of negative consequences do women perceive are associated with these behaviours for the gambler and their social network members?
3. How do women describe the impacts of someone else's gambling on their own lives?

2 | METHODS

2.1 | Approach

The authors took a public health approach to the research to consider the broad causes and impacts of gambling harm.⁵ This research took a critical qualitative approach to inquiry, which aims to explore the role of power, inequality, and injustice in health.³⁰ This approach is useful given the global recognition that there are clear inequalities in the distribution of gambling harm.^{1,31} Critical qualitative approaches to inquiries have a clear social justice focus and aim to move beyond interpretation, to ensure that the voices of those impacted are used to advocate for social change, and to influence meaningful policy reform, particularly in relation to experiences of inequality in everyday life.³²

The data presented in this paper formed part of a broader online panel survey with $n = 1040$ women over the age of 18 years, who had gambled in the last 12 months, and who were residing in the states of Victoria and New South Wales (NSW). These states were chosen as they have the highest annual electronic gambling machine (EGM) losses in Australia.³³ The broader study explored the gambling attitudes, gambling product engagement, and gambling risk behaviours of adult women. Online qualitative surveys were chosen due to the level of anonymity they allow, which can lead to more honest and open responses, and provide convenience for participants to complete at their own pace.³⁴ Braun and colleagues suggest that online qualitative surveys offer openness and flexibility to address a wide range of research questions and capture a diversity of perspectives which is

useful when researching an under-explored area.³⁵ Importantly, this method offers a wide scope for analysis whereby patterns can be developed from across the data set.³⁵

2.2 | Sample and recruitment

Recruitment was facilitated by Qualtrics, through online panel companies. Individuals were sent the survey description and received a Plain Language Statement and consent form before participating. To participate, individuals had to identify as female, have gambled at least once in the last 12 months, and live in Victoria or NSW. Participants who did not meet the inclusion criteria were screened out and soft quotas were used to ensure relatively equal numbers of women across state and age groups for the broader study. Participants were able to withdraw from the survey at any point. This paper focused on a subsection of the survey which related to women's experiences as an affected other. The paper explores the responses from $n = 136$ women (13.1% of the sample) who answered yes to a question about being negatively impacted by someone else's gambling.

2.3 | Data collection

Following a pilot period involving 53 responses to check for the applicability and understanding of questions, the survey was launched in April 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is important to note that at this time several states in Australia had gone into lockdown which involved the closure of many physical gambling venues such as clubs, hotels, and casinos, although there were no such restrictions relating to online forms of gambling. The data set was finalised after a process of data cleaning to remove low quality responses. The data analysed for this paper focused on data collected in four sections of the survey:

Socio-demographic characteristics

Age, state or territory of residence, education, employment status, and income.

Gambling characteristics

Use of EGMs (pokies, poker machines), sports betting, horse betting, lotteries, casino gambling, and/or instant lotteries in the last 12 months.

Concern for someone else's gambling

In relation to women's concern for someone else's gambling, participants were asked: "Have you ever been concerned about someone else's gambling?" Those who selected "yes" were then asked; "Who was the person you were concerned about?" with participants required to select from a list of options: Family member; partner; friend; child; and other. Participants were then asked to describe these concerns in open text responses.

Impacts of someone else's gambling on their own lives

In relation to the impact someone else's gambling had on women, participants were asked: "Have you ever been negatively impacted by

TABLE 1 Participant demographics and gambling characteristics ($n = 136$)

Characteristic	<i>n</i>	% of sample
State of residence		
New South Wales	70	51.5
Victoria	66	48.5
Age		
18–29	31	22.8
30–45	42	30.9
46–60	30	22.1
Over 60	33	24.3
Education		
Below year 10	4	2.9
Year 10	14	10.3
Year 12	20	14.7
Certificate I, II, III, IV	24	17.6
Diploma/advance diploma	26	19.1
Bachelor's degree	35	25.7
Graduate diploma/graduate certificate	2	1.5
Postgraduate degree	11	8.1
Employment status		
Working full time	48	35.3
Working part time or casually	30	22.1
Unemployed	11	8.1
Homemaker	14	10.3
Retired	21	15.4
Full time student	6	4.4
Other	6	4.4
Gambling products used ^a		
Lotteries	102	75.0
Instant lotteries	77	56.6
EGMs	64	47.1
Horse betting	43	31.6
Casino gambling	29	21.3
Sports betting	25	18.4

^aTotals do not add up to 100% as participants could select more than one option.

someone else's gambling?" Participants were also asked to describe in open text responses how they may have been negatively impacted by someone else's gambling.

2.4 | Data analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using IBM Statistical Program for Social Sciences (SPSS) software, where descriptive statistics were calculated for socio-demographic variables and gambling characteristics. Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis was used to guide data interpretation of the qualitative open text responses.³⁶ The aim was

to construct themes from the data, with quotes used to illustrate the key concepts within these themes.³⁵ This involved reading and re-reading the data; generating initial codes; searching for broader themes by analysing and grouping initial codes; reviewing and refining themes; defining and naming the themes; and writing up the analysis.³⁷ Qualitative responses were constructed into broad descriptive categories relating to (a) who participants were concerned about, (b) what they were concerned about and (c) how they were negatively impacted. Finally, a model was developed to pictorially demonstrate the key themes.

3 | RESULTS

3.1 | Socio-demographic and gambling characteristics

The socio-demographic and gambling characteristics of the $n = 136$ women who reported being negatively impacted by someone else's gambling are reported in Table 1. The age of participants ranged from 18 to 79 ($M = 45.02$, $SD: 16.25$). Over half of participants were from NSW ($n = 70$, 51.5%), and just over half were employed in either full time or part time work ($n = 78$, 57.4%). The top three gambling products used by women in the last 12 months were lotteries ($n = 102$, 75.0%), instant lotteries ($n = 77$, 56.6%) and EGMs ($n = 64$, 47.1%).

Most women reported that they were concerned about the gambling of someone in their social network ($n = 109$, 80.1%), with 11 (10.1%) of these participants concerned about the gambling of more than one individual in their network. Over a quarter were concerned about their partner's gambling ($n = 40$, 29.4%), over a quarter were concerned about a family member's (i.e. parents and siblings) gambling ($n = 38$, 27.9%), approximately one in five were concerned about a friend's gambling ($n = 27$, 19.9%), and seven (5.1%) were concerned about their child's gambling. Twelve participants (8.8%) reported concerns about the gambling behaviours of a work colleague, ex-partner, or relative of a partner.

There were four key concerns and associated negative impacts that women experienced as an affected other: the financial impact of gambling; the negative impact of gambling on relationships; the impact of gambling on mental health and emotional wellbeing; and the experiences as a child of a parent who gambled. These negative impacts were often interrelated. For example, the impacts on participants' finances subsequently impacted on their relationship with the gambler, and thus caused a range of negative mental and emotional impacts on the participant.

3.2 | The financial impact of gambling

Financial impacts were the primary concern of participants and the most commonly reported direct negative impact associated with another person's gambling. This often related to the amount of money spent on gambling by individuals in their networks. Financial concerns were evident regardless of whose gambling the participant was

concerned about. One participant discussed that there was a level of gambling and spending that she was comfortable with, and became worried when her family member exceeded this. Rather than commenting that the individual should not gamble at all, participants often had clear perceptions of how much they thought the gambler could reasonably afford to spend on gambling. This was often conceptualised in terms of whether gambling would impact the gambler's ability to pay for "other things" such as food or household essentials. When specifically discussing gambling-related debt, participants described how they knew someone who had stolen money or regularly borrowed money from family and friends in order to fund their gambling. For example, one participant described a friend who was a welfare recipient, and was becoming increasingly indebted by taking out high interest loans to cover her gambling losses:

Spends all of her Centrelink payment on pokies. Has no money for anything, always having to pay people back and has taken out pay day loans. – 46 years old, Victoria; Friend.

Participants were also concerned about the frequency and intensity of an individual's gambling – although this was often connected to the amount of money spent. Women reported that they felt the spending of someone in their social network was "careless" and "reckless", often comparing their own gambling behaviour to the member of their social network. When reporting these behaviours, participants often used extreme examples, for instance, that a gambler in their network caused a family breakdown or divorce, would regularly gamble their entire pay or pension, or that they were gambling every day:

He is always going to Crown [casino] almost every day ... he is kind of addicted. – 30 years old, Victoria; Friend.

The nature of these concerns mostly related to individualised paradigms of gambling behaviour – including whether the participant perceived their network member could afford to gamble, was being responsible with their gambling, or were gambling too frequently. This included some women commenting on their network member gambling beyond their limit, or not being "able to limit themselves". For example, the following participant described her adult child's gambling:

Gambles way too much and never has enough money for other things. – 62 years old, NSW; Child.

Several participants reported a range of financial consequences associated with the gambling behaviours of their network members. This included "going broke", not being able to pay bills and going into debt. This had a direct negative impact on some women in this study who reported not having enough money for essentials, or to buy food, or pay bills. These participants expressed how this had made them stressed and concerned about their financial security as they struggled to make ends meet. Financial harms often were attributed to

situations where the gambler diverted money to gambling that was needed for the family:

They used to lose money that was supposed to be used for the household. – 20 years old, Victoria; Family.

Many participants described the challenges in sharing finances with a partner who gambled. Participants were negatively impacted as the money that was spent gambling left a lasting legacy on the participant's life. For example, some participants described needing to access loans to pay off a debt that the gambler had incurred:

Got into debt that we could not pay off without a loan. – 55 years old, NSW; Partner.

Others described the impact gambling had on their housing situation. This included losing the money that was supposed to be for a house deposit, fear that they would lose their house, or losing their house due to gambling:

Lost my house because of my ex. – 36 year old, NSW; Partner.

Some participants also reported the financial stress of being asked for money, or having to lend money to support someone who was gambling. Several participants stated they were asked by someone in their social network for money, with some participants also reporting they were asked on more than one occasion and had to pay money to help with rent or other bills that the gambler was unable to pay. These participants reported feeling like there was pressure or an obligation put on them to give money due to the nature of their relationship with the gambler – often a family member. Some participants lent money to friends and family members under the guise that it was for something important but “*later learnt it was for gambling*”. Many of these participants stated that they were never paid the money back. A few participants in this study reported having their money stolen by someone in their social network. Most commonly, these participants reported that it was a family member who stole money to maintain their gambling. Having money stolen by a parent impacted participants emotionally as well as hurting their relationship. For example, one woman described how her father's gambling, and him stealing money from her, impacted on her:

Large amounts of money went missing from my personal bank account and my father was responsible. As my father spiralled out of control, my life became less stable because of his gambling. – 24 years old, NSW; Family.

3.3 | The negative impact of gambling on relationships

These financial harms often contributed to tensions in relationships between the participant and the gambler, particularly relating

to a loss of trust. Participants often stated that gamblers were unreliable, sneaky, or “*very secretive*” about a range of gambling behaviours, including their wins and losses – “*only hear about her wins and not her losses*”. Reports of secrecy were most common in relation to a partner's or family member's gambling. A couple of women reported that their partner had lied about how much money and time they spent on gambling, which subsequently caused issues in the relationship. Suggestions that their partner or social network member had an addiction to gambling was common in these responses. Secrecy, lying, and stealing were characterised as “*typical*” behaviours for someone who was addicted to gambling:

My friend was so addicted to pokies she did all the typical things addicts do, lie, steal, lost her job, had to go to court. She pushed me away, so I just went on with my life. – 62 years old, Victoria; Friend.

For a few women in this study, secrecy around gambling led to ending the relationship. For example, one participant described that the gambler hid their gambling behaviour and “*kept secrets and lied*”, with another woman stating that this was one reason she ended the relationship:

This friend was also my boyfriend for a bit and his gambling on pokies used to really upset me, not the whole reason we broke up but one small part of it. He would lie that he was doing it or understate how much he spent. – 52 years old, NSW; Partner.

Gambling also impacted participants' relationships when they felt that they were not a priority in the relationship. For example, a couple of women reported feeling that they had been pushed away, excluded, or that the gambler was always absent, or put gambling first. These participants perceived that gambling reduced the quality of time spent together, with one woman stating:

A friend once told me to get away from her while playing as I was bad luck, my other friend was so absorbed in playing I could only get yes/no answers from her and she did not take her eyes off the machine. – 60 years old, NSW; Friend.

3.4 | The impact of gambling on mental health and emotional wellbeing

A smaller number of participants were concerned about the way gambling negatively impacted the gambler's mental health. A few participants stated they had a family member who was gambling and also experiencing depression, which they believed was directly related to losing money from gambling. One participant expressed concern about a family member due to the connection between that person's gambling practices, alcohol consumption, and mental

health. Again many of the harms were interconnected and for some were ongoing:

He was gambling, mostly betting on horses. Inherited a lot of money and lost it with gambling. After a while he fell into depression and started having a drinking problem. He does not gamble anymore only very occasionally but still has a drinking problem. – 41 years old, NSW; Family.

A couple of participants reported knowing people who had experienced a gambling addiction, and had died by suicide. These participants acknowledged suicide as one of the most serious harms associated with gambling.

A few women in this study reported experiencing emotional and psychological harms from someone else's gambling. These participants described the emotional burdens that they experienced because of the individual's gambling. For example, participants discussed noticing “*mood swings*” depending on whether the gambler won or lost money gambling. Participants reported that the gambler would get “*irritable when losing*” and get angry and “*ruin a night*”. This impacted participants' own moods, including the extent to which they enjoyed leisure activities and nights out. Some participants reported that they had frequent arguments about a gambler's behaviour, which led to significant stress and worry. Participants often described the emotional toll that the gambler's behaviour had on them. This included being sad about friends who were “*obsessed with pokies*”, through to those who described how they would have to support the gambler in times of distress:

I have a girlfriend who wastes her wages on gambling and then shows up at my home in distress and I sit up with her all night to talk about it. – 61 years old, Victoria; Friend.

3.5 | Experiences as a child of a parent who gambled

A number of participants stated that they had been negatively impacted as a child by their parent's gambling. The financial, relationship, and emotional harms associated with gambling had unique negative impacts on these participants. Several participants described what it was like to grow up with a gambler and the impact this had on themselves and other family members during their childhood. A few participants in this study described that they had a “*bad childhood*” or that their parent's gambling had “*ruined [their] childhood*”;

... when I was a child [my mother] was addicted to poker machines. It was so bad that she would rush in and throw some fish and chips on the table for our dinner and would say she had to go back because her machine

was about to pay. I had a bad childhood because of my mother's gambling. – 65 years old, NSW; Family.

They reported how, due to their parent's gambling, they often “*went without*” as children, suggesting they “*never had money for anything*”. For some participants, this involved having an “*unstable home growing up*”, where their parents would struggle to provide for the family due to limited funds. One participant described the impact this had on her mother:

When I was a child my dad would gamble, and my non-working mum would have to provide everything for me and my siblings. – 24 years old, NSW; Family.

The following participant recalled that her father's gambling restricted the opportunities she had as a child, and recalled her parents fighting about her father's gambling:

I grew up in a house where my father gambled and as kids, we had nothing, also never went anywhere and sometimes my parents would fight about it. – 70 years old, NSW; Family.

A few participants recalled specific negative events relating to their parent's gambling, including that their parents were often absent, they were left in the car while their parents gambled, or that they had spent a lot of time at gambling venues as children:

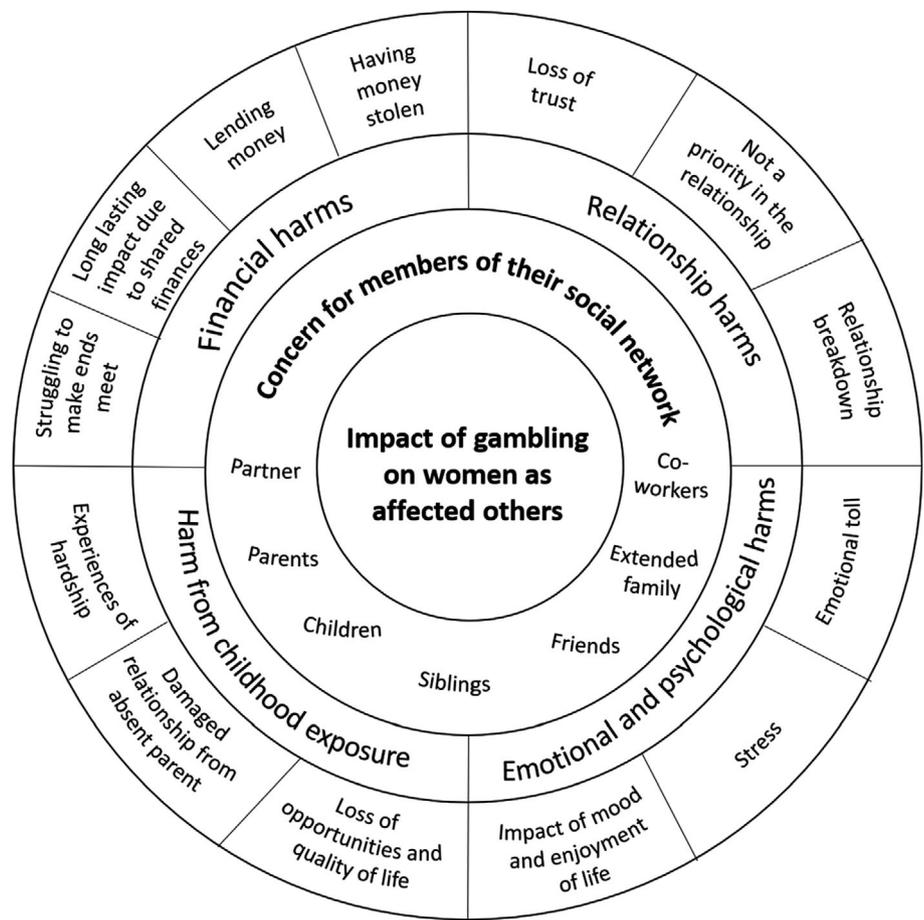
Growing up with a gambler was like he was there but wasn't. As kids, spent a lot of time at TABs, races. – 31 years old, Victoria; Family.

Several participants perceived that during their childhood their parent was consumed by gambling, with some stating that they felt that their parent had chosen gambling over them. For example, one 55-year-old stated “*they loved gambling more than me*”.

4 | DISCUSSION

This research aimed to examine the broader range of women's concerns about the gambling behaviours of social network members, and any impacts these gambling behaviours had on their own lives. This study focused on three areas of investigation – the concerns women had about the gambling behaviours of someone in their social networks; the types of negative consequences women perceived were associated with these behaviours for these individuals; and the negative impacts of another person's gambling on their own lives. Figure 1 provides a descriptive model of the key findings of the study. The model depicts four broad domains of harm that were discussed by women in this study – financial harms, relationship harms, emotional and psychological harms, and childhood harms – with specific examples of the different types of harms experienced in these categories.

FIGURE 1 A descriptive model of the impact of gambling on women as affected others



The circular nature of the descriptive model aims to indicate that these harms were often interconnected, most commonly between financial harm and relationship harm.

This study demonstrated that women have a range of concerns about the gambling behaviours of individuals in their social networks. Importantly, these concerns not only relate to close members of their social networks (for example partners or family members), but extended to more distant members of their social networks, including friends and work colleagues. Individuals may also have more than one person in their network whose gambling behaviours they are concerned about. Participants recognised a range of risk characteristics of concern, and were able to identify the broad range of negative impacts that gambling could have for not only the gambler, but also their social network members. This demonstrates that women have at least a general awareness of the pervasive and extensive negative impact that gambling can have on individuals, their families, and communities. However, all participants in this study described their concerns in terms of the individual's behaviour and their perceptions of the individual's responsibility to limit or control these behaviours. This included significant moral judgements about those who they perceived were unable to take responsibility for their gambling. Even when concerned about an individual's gambling behaviours, women rarely commented that the individual should stop gambling, but suggested a range of strategies to enable the individual to 'gamble responsibly'. Furthermore, there was no focus on the broader range of factors that may contribute to risky gambling

behaviours – including social norms, gambling environments, or the nature of gambling products.

The participants' focus on individual behaviours is perhaps not surprising given the dominant discourses related to 'responsible gambling behaviours' in government and industry education campaigns.^{28,38} Orford argues that responsible gambling discourses may create a perception that gambling products (and environments) are largely unproblematic, and that enacting the appropriate behaviours with these products minimises and prevents harm.³⁹ In this context, it should be remembered that the women in this study were gamblers themselves. Researchers have demonstrated that gamblers often perceive that personal (ir)responsibility and (ir)rational behaviours are two of the main drivers of gambling-related harm, and are similar to the personal responsibility framings and tropes present in industry and government messaging strategies.²⁸ Savard and colleagues state that this perception also puts the weight of a complex economic, political, and social problem on the shoulders of individuals, with personal responsibility framings internalised and maintained by gamblers themselves.²⁹ Researchers have found that this focus on individualised responsibility for gambling behaviours, while well meaning, may do more harm than good in helping individuals who are experiencing gambling harm. For example, research with individuals who have experienced problems with gambling have demonstrated that individuals perceive that a focus on responsible gambling, and individual behaviours are stigmatising, contribute to a sense of personal blame and shame, and may prevent them from seeking

help.⁴⁰ Campaigns which encourage discussions about the impact of the gambling industry on behaviours, including the impact of products on the brain,⁴¹ may help to remove stigma, and enable those who are concerned about the gambling behaviour of a network member to engage in supportive and non-judgemental discussions.

There were a number of important findings about the types of direct negative impacts that women had as a result of someone else's gambling, and the meanings that women made of these experiences. Similar to other studies,^{16,42} most negative experiences were the result of the behaviours of a close network member – such as a partner, family member or close friend. Researchers have often focused on women's negative experiences as a result of the gambling behaviours of a male partner.^{22,43} While these studies are important, we must ensure that studies do not unintentionally create a perception that our primary focus on affected others are women impacted by men. Women gamblers also experience problems with gambling,⁴⁴⁻⁴⁶ and the women in this study stated they were negatively impacted by the gambling of both male and female network members. A lack of nuance around gender may contribute to the continued primary focus on men in gambling interventions, and may contribute to entrenching the gender inequalities associated with current population responses to female gambling.^{25,26} Therefore, the findings of this research support the implementation of gender transformative approaches which aim to address inequalities by exposing and changing harmful gender stereotypes and norms.⁴⁷ This will be important in any future comprehensive public health approaches to gambling harm prevention.

This study also provides more nuance about the extent and breadth of harms that individuals might experience as an affected other. Three of the broad categories of harm that were identified in this study – relationships, emotional health, and financial health – have been well recognised in the gambling harm literature,⁴³ although mostly in relation to male partners. This study provides insights into the range of harms that women might experience as an affected other – from those that might be considered as relatively minor, through to more severe harms. While some existing studies have focused on the very extreme experiences of these harms – such as economic abuse and intimate partner violence^{22,48} – this study indicates the importance of understanding how gambling may contribute to a range of negative experiences and impacts for affected others. While there are obviously some very extreme examples of harm with devastating impacts on affected others, far more commonplace across the population will be lower level harms – such as worry about a gambler's behaviour, or having a small amount of money borrowed but not returned. At a population level, however, these lower level harms may still contribute to significant health and social costs. For example, the loss of trust with a family member or partner, or disagreements with female friends relating to gambling, may have direct and indirect impacts on social connectedness, social support, and social engagement for both affected others and gamblers. Previous research in Australia and internationally has identified that emotional distress is one of the most common harms experienced from another person's gambling.^{24,49} The current study contributes to this research by showing that the emotional burden for affected others may range from worry, a lack of enjoyment of life, to

the emotional toll associated with supporting a gambler in distress. The current research advocates for greater attention to be paid to the range of impacts gambling may have on the affected other and their relationships with the gambler when considering the support that is needed.

Finally, this study provides important qualitative insights into the intergenerational impacts of gambling harm. While researchers and clinicians acknowledge that growing up in a house with a problem gambler may have a devastating impact on the lives of children,⁵⁰ there is still very limited information about the impact on children as affected others. This study identifies that there can be significant health and social costs for children who grow up in a family of a gambler. These range from lost opportunities, witnessing family conflict, and feeling that they were not a priority for their parent. Future research should further explore the potential short and long term impacts of intergenerational gambling.

4.1 | Limitations

This study focused on the broad experiences of women as affected others. Future in-depth qualitative studies should further explore whether there are distinct experiences of different population subgroups of women, for example according to age or cultural background. These types of studies will provide further detailed information to guide health promotion and public health interventions which are targeted to different population groups. Qualitative survey data includes responses which may lack the layers of detail and emotional and social nuances associated with in-depth interview studies.⁵¹ However, they provide an important wide angle lens of the experiences of population groups, enable individuals to discuss sensitive topics in an anonymous format, and are an important mechanism for engaging hard to reach groups.

5 | CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates the impacts of gambling harm on women who are affected others. This includes concerns for members of their social networks, as well as negative impacts on their finances, relationships, and emotional wellbeing as a result of the gambling of a partner, friend or family member. This was particularly detrimental for women who were impacted as a child by their parent's gambling. This study enhances our understanding of how women may be harmed by gambling, and considers the complexities of their experiences and relationships with the gambler. This extends knowledge beyond quantitative descriptors of harm among affected others, and provides a critical analysis of the nuances associated with women's experiences of gambling harm. Comprehensive public health approaches to gambling harm should continue to utilise gender transformative approaches to consider, and respond to, the unique experiences and perspectives of women.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

SM has received an Australian Government Research Training Program stipend from Deakin University for her PhD related to gambling and women. S.L.T currently receives funding from the Australian Research Council Discovery Grant Scheme, the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, and the New South Wales Office of Gaming for research relating to public health responses to gambling harm prevention. She has previously received funding for gambling research from the Australian Research Council Discovery Grant Scheme, and the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation. She has received travel expenses for gambling speaking engagements from the European Union, Beat the Odds Wales, the Office of Gaming and Racing ACT, and the Royal College of Psychiatry Wales. She is a member of the Responsible Gambling Advisory Board for Lotterywest. She does not receive financial reimbursement for this role. HP has received funding from the Australian Research Council, the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation and the NSW Office of Gaming. EW has no conflicts of interest to declare. GRD has received funding from the personal research budgets of a number of Senedd Cymru/Welsh Parliament members. He has also received funding from European Social Funds/Welsh Government, Alcohol Concern (now Alcohol Change UK) and Research Councils. He is an invited observer of the Cross-Party Group on Problem Gambling at Senedd Cymru, a member of the Chief Medical Officer for Wales/Minster for Mental Health Task and Finish Group on Gambling related harm (Senedd Cymru) and sits on the "Beat the Odds" steering group that is run by Adferiad Recovery Ltd. AR has been employed on grants funded by the Australian Research Council and the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation. She has contributed to studies funded by Australian Institute of Family Studies, Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety, and the Australian Commonwealth Department of Social Services. Angela has received travel funding from the Turkish Green Crescent Society, Monash University and the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust. BJ has received funding from the personal research budgets of a number of Senedd Cymru / Welsh Parliament members. She has also received funding from European Social Funds/Welsh Government, Alcohol Concern (now Alcohol Change UK) and Research Councils. She is an invited observer of the Cross-Party Group on Problem Gambling at Senedd Cymru, a member of the Chief Medical Officer for Wales / Minster for Mental Health Task and Finish Group on Gambling-related harm (Senedd Cymru) and sits on the "Beat the Odds" steering group that is run by Adferiad Recovery Ltd.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

The research received ethical approval from the Deakin University Faculty of Health Human Ethics Advisory Group [HEAG-H 08_2020].

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