STRESS & PRODUCTIVITY IN HOSPITALITY & GAMBLING WORKPLACES

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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

Workplace Stressors
- Employment conditions
- Customer and management expectations
- Physical & social environments
- Interpersonal interactions
- Resource adequacies
- Responsibilities
- Workloads
- Roles

Employee Stress Responses
- Anxiety/Isolation
- Fatigue/Distress
- Exhaustion/Burnout
- Withdrawal
- Cynicism/depersonalisation
- Reduced personal efficacy
- Possible addictive behaviours

Workplace Mediating Factors
- Organisational culture
- Management style and attitudes
- Organisational support
- Training/recruitment strategies
- Work life balance

Personal/Social Mediating Factors
- Personal coping resources
- Personality/personal expectations
- Support of family and friends
- Affect of other stress related issues

Employee Work Impacts
- Reduced job satisfaction
- Reduced performance
- Relationship pressures
- Increased conflict
- Reduced morale
- Withdrawal

Organisational Impacts
- Reduced commitment
- Increased turnover
- Reduced service quality
- Reduced efficiency
- Reduced productivity
- Reduced profitability

Personal Impacts
- Health issues
- Increased conflict
- Reduced wellbeing
- Eroded identity
- Health risk behaviours

Family & Social Impacts
- Relationship issues
- Reduced quality of life
- Legal costs
- Health and welfare costs
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 it’s 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.