

# Host Responsibility in Class 4 Gambling Venues: A Qualitative Report

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# CONTENTS

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<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Executive summary</b> .....	<b>6</b>
Background.....	6
Methodology .....	6
Key findings .....	7
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>10</b>
Purpose .....	10
<b>Methodology</b> .....	<b>12</b>
Selecting methods and planning data collection.....	12
Data collection .....	13
Ethics.....	13
Data analysis .....	14
Limitations.....	14
Respondent overview .....	15
<b>Gambler overview</b> .....	<b>16</b>
Becoming a gambler .....	16
Motivations and feelings about gambling .....	17
Frequency of gambling .....	19
Strategies to manage gambling.....	19
Help seeking awareness .....	21
Stopping gambling .....	22
<b>Staff overview</b> .....	<b>24</b>
Types of venue .....	24
Professional roles .....	24
Perceptions of gambling.....	24
<b>Interactions in the gambling environment</b> .....	<b>26</b>
Interactions between patrons .....	26
Interactions between staff and patrons.....	27
<b>Host responsibility requirements</b> .....	<b>29</b>
Identifying problem gamblers .....	29

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Monitoring the environment.....	30
Perceptions of host responsibility requirements .....	31
Approaches.....	32
Barriers .....	36
Overcoming barriers .....	38
Training.....	39
<b>Future change .....</b>	<b>42</b>
Visual materials .....	42
Venue level change .....	44
Regulatory change.....	45
<b>Discussion.....</b>	<b>49</b>
Conclusions .....	51
<b>References .....</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>Appendix A: Gambler interview guide.....</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>Appendix B: Staff interview guide .....</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>Appendix C: Respondent information sheets.....</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>Appendix D: Consent forms.....</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>Appendix E: Socio-demographic questionnaire.....</b>	<b>63</b>

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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## BACKGROUND

The use of electronic gaming machines (EGMs) is a common form of gambling that is known to be harmful for some participants. Gambling on EGMs commonly takes place in pubs, clubs and hotels, defined as 'Class 4 venues' under the Gambling Act 2003. Under the Gambling (Harm Prevention and Minimisation) Regulations 2004 a person trained in problem gambling awareness must be present when machines are available for use in Class 4 venues. Trained staff are expected to be aware of potentially harmful gambling and approach individuals who could be at risk to provide information on gambling harm and support available. International evidence suggests that staff often have difficulty identifying problem gamblers and approaching those who may be at risk (Delfabbro, Osborn, McMillen, Neville, & Skelt, 2007; Delfabbro, Borgas, & King, 2012; Hing & Nuske, 2011). However, there is a lack of research documenting the experiences and perceptions of staff and patrons of Class 4 venues in New Zealand.

The Health Promotion Agency (HPA) is responsible for delivering a programme focused on minimising gambling harm, which includes a mass media campaign, the development of resources, and research and evaluation. This research was undertaken to help inform a campaign on host responsibility in Class 4 venues as part of HPA's programme.

This report provides an overview of findings from interviews with 18 staff and 14 people with experience gambling in Class 4 venues, focused on perceptions of EGM behaviours, interactions in the EGM area, host responsibility, and future change.

## METHODOLOGY

The data collection involved semi-structured interviews with 18 staff working in Class 4 venues and 14 people with experience gambling in such venues. Qualitative methods were used to collect in-depth perspectives on host responsibility from the perspectives of gamblers and staff.

Interviews with staff were conducted in Wellington, Christchurch and a provincial North Island area. The provincial area has not been named in this report to protect the privacy of respondents and venues involved. For logistical reasons, interviews with gamblers were conducted only in the Wellington region. All interviews were audio recorded with the respondent's consent and were transcribed verbatim. Thematic analysis was used to identify key themes.

Ethics approval was granted by the New Zealand Ethics Committee prior to commencing fieldwork. All interviews were conducted by HPA researchers between 4 December 2013 and 13 January 2014.

## KEY FINDINGS

Two types of respondent were interviewed as part of this study. Understanding the perspectives of gamblers in Class 4 venues and staff working within these venues was of interest in this research.

### **Gambler respondents**

Respondents first started using EGMs at varying times in their lives. Respondents described first using EGMs during their childhood or early adulthood, or as adults due to curiosity or boredom. Key motivations for using EGMs were the desire to win money and to 'zone out' and relax. However, respondents indicated that their use of EGMs more often resulted in frustration and financial loss.

Respondents varied in the extent of their gambling with four respondents describing their gambling as problematic, eight disclosing a previous gambling problem, one describing infrequent gambling and one describing behaviour indicative of a gambling problem though not identifying themselves as being in this situation. Eight respondents described currently feeling relatively in control of their gambling while four felt completely in control and two did not feel in control at all.

Strategies described to manage their gambling included keeping busy with work and family life, setting cash limits, leaving their EFTPOS card at home and support from peers. However, four respondents noted that their efforts to manage their gambling were rarely successful.

The majority of respondents were aware of where and how to get help if they wanted support to manage their gambling.

### **Staff respondents**

Staff were recruited from a range of venues across Wellington, Christchurch and a provincial North Island area. These venues included restaurant bars, sports bars and private members' clubs. Thirteen respondents described EGMs as a central part of the business. All staff respondents had some degree of management responsibility in the venue and were directly engaging with EGM users on a daily basis.

Perceptions of gambling were relatively mixed with the majority of the 18 staff interviewed feeling indifferent to the use of EGMs, while seven staff members expressed overtly negative views on EGM gambling. Five staff members disclosed that they were gamblers, though none gambled in the venue they were working in.

### **Interactions in the gambling environment**

Overall, gambler respondents described little interaction with other patrons in the EGM area and gambling on EGMs was largely described by both staff and gambler respondents as a relatively solitary activity. Although infrequent interaction was described between gamblers and other patrons, it was clear that interaction between staff and patrons did occur, typically when patrons entered the premises. However, only very limited interaction between staff and patrons was

described in the gaming area. These were predominantly spontaneous interactions that occurred when staff were undertaking other essential tasks in the EGM area.

## **Host responsibility requirements**

Key factors that assisted staff in identifying problem gamblers included multiple or large cash withdrawals at the bar using EFTPOS, emotional reactions, making disclosures to staff about gambling, spending long periods of time in the gaming room, walking in and out of the venue to access the ATM, leaving children unattended outside, out of character behaviour among regular patrons, and miscellaneous 'unusual' behaviours. Although staff did identify some key factors that helped them to identify problem gamblers, it was clear that this was a complex process.

There were several barriers to identifying and approaching problem gamblers, including social embarrassment and awkwardness, intimidation, and ambiguity in relation to the financial and personal circumstances of patrons. Building relationships with patrons was central to overcoming these barriers. However, this was complicated by the perception that staff should not perform a counselling role. Staff were, therefore, walking a challenging line between building these relationships and maintaining an appropriate professional boundary.

Overall, staff were very uneasy about approaching people they thought could be at risk of gambling harm, as a consequence of the barriers described. Gambler respondents were also predominantly negative about the prospect of being approached by a staff member, with embarrassment, humiliation and anger being the key feelings described. However, only one respondent had knowingly been approached by a staff member to check in with them about their gambling.

The majority of staff respondents described using an indirect and non-confrontational approach to checking in with patrons, often using casual conversation to create an opportunity. Gambler respondents were mixed in their perceptions of what would be the most appropriate approach, however overall discretion was considered important.

## **Future change**

Respondents offered a range of suggested changes that could be implemented at a venue or government level in order to make gambling environments safer and support staff in their role around host responsibility.

The majority of staff and gambler respondents were sceptical or indifferent regarding the provision of visual materials on gambling harms, such as pamphlets and wallet cards. However, a few respondents did offer suggestions regarding the design of visual materials. Suggestions included making materials more eye catching, with more images, asking thought provoking questions, and emphasising that staff were there to help.

Other suggestions made at a venue level included limiting EFTPOS withdrawals at the bar and more natural light in the EGM area.

Several suggestions were raised by respondents relating to regulatory change. These included time restrictions, advertising restrictions, restricting the number of machines and/or venues, provisions that would enable patrons to self regulate including a swipe card system for entry to venues and a card system to monitor play, and general comments around tighter regulation, coherent and consistent guidelines, and stronger leadership.

The findings of this research demonstrate the importance of host responsibility but also highlight the significant challenges for staff attempting to do this in a way that reaches gamblers who may need help, in a meaningful and sensitive manner. It is critical to find ways to normalise these approaches among patrons so that host responsibility measures are effective in reaching more people who may be experiencing gambling harm, while also enabling changes to regulation and gambling environments to help prevent the development of gambling problems.

## INTRODUCTION

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Gambling on electronic gaming machines (EGMs), commonly known as 'pokies', is a relatively common form of gambling in New Zealand. Much of this gambling takes place in 'Class 4' venues, which include pubs, clubs and hotels. In a recent study it was found that one in seven (13.6%, 10.8-16.3) adults had played gaming machines in a pub or club within the previous 12 months (Tu, 2013). Gambling on EGMs in pubs and clubs can be harmful for some users. A New Zealand study found that people who had participated regularly (weekly or more often) in continuous<sup>1</sup> forms of gambling were more likely to be at risk of developing a problem and this was found to be particularly the case for those playing EGMs in pubs or clubs (Tu, 2013). Playing EGMs in pubs or clubs has also been found to be most commonly associated with gambling-related arguments, money problems, and people gambling more than intended (Walton, 2012). It is estimated that approximately two thirds of those who seek help for gambling behaviour primarily use EGMs in Class 4 venues (Ministry of Health, 2007).

Gambling in New Zealand is regulated by the Gambling Act 2003 and preventing and minimising gambling-related harm is a key purpose of the Act. Under Section 12 of the Gambling (Harm Prevention and Minimisation) Regulations 2004, it is a requirement that a person trained in problem gambling awareness is present at all times in Class 4 venues when the machines are available for use. Under these regulations, the training provided must meet minimum standards to enable staff working in these venues to approach patrons who may be experiencing difficulties related to their gambling and provide appropriate information on gambling harms and help available.

International findings show that staff can experience a range of difficulties identifying problem gamblers and intervening if they think someone may be at risk of gambling harm (Delfabbro, Osborn, McMillen, Neville, & Skelt, 2007; Delfabbro, Borgas, & King, 2012; Hing & Nuske, 2011). However, there is a lack of research documenting the experiences and perceptions of staff and gamblers in Class 4 venues in New Zealand. In a study conducted in 2010 eight gamblers were interviewed and it was found that the majority of respondents had never been approached by a staff member about their gambling and there were mixed views on whether or not this would have an impact on their gambling behaviour. Respondents also suggested that if they were approached they would avoid the venue in future (Thomas, Mora, & Rive, 2010). However, there has been no other research conducted in the New Zealand context that explores the perceptions of both staff and gamblers on the issue of host responsibility.

## PURPOSE

Under the Gambling Act 2003, the Ministry of Health is responsible for the prevention of problem gambling and the Health Promotion Agency (HPA) is contracted to deliver a programme that is

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<sup>1</sup> Continuous forms of gambling are types of gambling where winnings can be reinvested immediately, compared to 'non-continuous' forms of gambling such as Lotto tickets.

focused on minimising gambling harm. HPA's Minimising Gambling Harm programme includes a mass media campaign, the development of resources, and research and evaluation.

This research was undertaken in order to build on existing knowledge of host responsibility in Class 4 venues to help ensure any future HPA campaign focused on this issue is evidence based. The purpose of the research was to better understand how host responsibility is perceived, experienced, and approached 'on the ground' in Class 4 gambling venues in New Zealand.

This report explores themes relating to host responsibility in Class 4 gambling venues, from the perspectives of 18 staff and 14 people with experience gambling in such venues. This report begins with an explanation of the methodology, followed by an overview of the research participants. The report then moves to examine interactions in the gambling environment, before exploring in-depth perceptions and experiences of host responsibility from the perspectives of gamblers and staff participants. The report concludes with a an exploration of options for future change relating to host responsibility and reducing gambling harm, and a discussion of the implications of the broader research findings.

# METHODOLOGY

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## SELECTING METHODS AND PLANNING DATA COLLECTION

### **Methods**

Qualitative methods were used due to the nature of the information that was of interest for this project. This allowed the collection of individual perspectives on gambling in Class 4 venues and rich narratives of host responsibility requirements from gamblers and staff.

The method used was individual semi-structured interviews. Consideration was given to undertaking focus groups. However, individual interviews were most appropriate due to the sensitive nature of the research. This ensured that staff could be as open as possible about their experiences working in the gambling environment and candid about host responsibility practices specific to their workplace. In-depth interviews also enabled gamblers to disclose the extent of their gambling, with assurance that they would remain anonymous throughout the research process.

Interviews with gamblers were focused on initiation to gambling, gambling history, strategies to manage gambling, feelings about gambling, contact with patrons and staff in gambling venues, perceptions of host responsibility requirements, help seeking, and future change to create safer gambling environments. Interviews with staff were focused on the nature of their workplace, perceptions of gambling, personal gambling behaviour, contact with patrons playing EGMs, time spent in the gaming machine area, understanding and perceptions of host responsibility requirements, venue-specific host responsibility practices, experience checking in with patrons, barriers to approaching patrons, training, and future change to support staff with host responsibility requirements. Interview guides were developed by researchers from HPA's Research and Evaluation Unit in consultation with HPA staff working within the minimising gambling harm programme.

### **Recruiting staff**

Six gambling trusts were contacted by minimising gambling harm programme staff at HPA to inform them of the project prior to contacting potential venues to invite staff to participate. A list of contact details for venues was provided to HPA researchers to contact directly. Individual venues were then contacted by phone to explain the project. Purposive sampling was used to ensure the most appropriate individuals who could usefully contribute to the project were recruited as respondents. When phoning venues the researchers asked to talk firstly to the Duty Manager. This was to ensure that staff who took part were actively working in the gaming environment and had completed host responsibility training.

### **Recruiting gamblers**

Gamblers were recruited via a poster that was displayed in Class 4 venues in the Wellington region. Eleven respondents were recruited having made contact with the researchers after seeing the poster. Three respondents were recruited through snowball methods following initial interviews.

On the first contact, all respondents were screened to ascertain that they had used EGMs at least four times in the past year. All respondents were over the age of 18.

## DATA COLLECTION

A total of 18 interviews were completed with six staff in Wellington, six in Christchurch and six in a provincial North Island area. Fourteen interviews were also completed with people with experience gambling on EGMs in Class 4 venues. For logistical reasons these interviews were all completed in the Wellington region.

All interviews were audio recorded with the respondents' consent.

It was anticipated that all staff interviews would take place outside of the workplace to ensure that they felt comfortable discussing their views and experiences openly. However, 11 staff members preferred to be interviewed in their workplace and this was respected.

All gambler interviews were completed in a mutually agreed public place with the exception of one, which was completed in the respondent's home at their request.

All interviews were carried out by HPA researchers and were completed between 4 December 2013 and 13 January 2014

## ETHICS

Gambling is a sensitive topic and, therefore, there were a number of ethical issues to consider both prior to and during the research process.

The potential vulnerability of respondents with experience gambling in Class 4 venues was considered throughout the research process. Although 'problem' gamblers were not specifically being recruited, it was possible that respondents could be vulnerable depending on their current gambling behaviour, perspective on that behaviour, and other personal circumstances. Therefore, there was a risk that respondents could become upset during interviews if they were currently struggling with their gambling or with other pressures in their lives. This situation did not eventuate. However, information leaflets on problem gambling support services were taken to each interview in case the respondent became upset and/or indicated that they would like support related to their gambling.

A further risk was the risk of being identified as a respondent in the research. Although gambling in general is not a stigmatised activity, there is stigma attached to problem gambling and particularly the habitual use of EGMs. This risk also extended to staff who could face negative consequences in their workplace if it became known that they had disclosed certain information. To minimise this risk no names have been used in this report, including the names of venues. Care has been taken to ensure no potentially identifying details have been included in this report.

All respondents were asked to read an information sheet (see Appendix C) before deciding whether or not to take part, and were required to sign a consent form to confirm that they understood the nature of the project and wished to participate (see Appendix D).

All respondents received a \$50 supermarket voucher as Koha. This project was approved by the New Zealand Ethics Committee on 2 October 2013.

## DATA ANALYSIS

All interview recordings were transcribed verbatim by a professional transcriber with experience managing sensitive data. Transcripts were then coded individually to identify themes. The themes that emerged represent the most pertinent issues raised by respondents. Transcripts were read several times to ensure a rigorous analysis and themes were discussed by all researchers involved in interviewing for the project before findings were finalised.

Some quotes have been edited for ease of reading. However, only punctuation has been added and occasional words added in square brackets to better convey the meaning.

## LIMITATIONS

This research has several limitations. This is a qualitative study, which means that it provides rich and detailed insights into individual experiences. The qualitative nature of this project does mean that the findings cannot be generalised across the New Zealand population. However, the findings do provide an in-depth insight into perceptions and experiences, which could not have been achieved through the use of quantitative methods.

Purposive sampling was used to recruit staff respondents and this is to some extent a limitation of the project. Purposive sampling was used, in the case of staff, to ensure the involvement of those that were best placed to contribute to the project. It is acknowledged that this could have an impact on the eventual findings. Gamblers self-selected through advertisements that were placed in Class 4 venues around the Wellington region. It has been argued that the use of this method is more likely to result in the recruitment of those who identify as having a gambling problem (Williams, Pulford, Bellringer, & Abbott, 2010). As such, the gambler participants in this study cannot be considered representative of the broader population. However, the purpose of this research was not to generalise but to provide an in-depth insight into individual experiences.

Six gambling Trusts were contacted prior to commencing the project to seek their support for conducting the research. Due to organisational reasons, the researchers were limited to only contacting venues connected to Trusts that had no objection to their venues being contacted. This is a limitation as it meant some venues of potential interest were excluded and staff working in these venues could not be invited to participate. There was also a risk that staff could feel compelled to participate since their Trust did not object to the research. However, Trusts were not informed of which venues were contacted and it was emphasised when recruiting staff that their participation would remain confidential.

## RESPONDENT OVERVIEW

At the start of the interview, respondents were asked to complete a short demographic questionnaire (see Appendix E). Respondents were diverse in their demographic characteristics and backgrounds.

### **Staff respondents**

Of the 18 staff interviewed nine were male and nine were female. One respondent was aged 18 to 21 years old, two respondents were 22 to 29 years, seven were 30 to 45 years, and eight were over 45 years old. Sixteen staff respondents identified as New Zealand European, two as Māori. Nine staff respondents were educated to University, Waananga or another tertiary level, seven to secondary school three years or more, and one to secondary school one to two years. One respondent did not answer this question.

Staff respondents had diverse experience working in environments where people are gambling and the total length of time varied between eight months and 30 years. The length of time spent working in their current role varied between four months and 23 years.

Staff respondents all had a degree of management responsibility, with job titles ranging from duty manager to owner/operator. All staff worked in roles that involved engaging with patrons and all but one had completed host responsibility training to work in the EGM area.

### **Gambler respondents**

Seven respondents with experience playing electronic EGMs in Class 4 venues were female and seven were male. Five respondents were aged between 22 and 29 years, six were aged 30 to 45 years, and three were over 45 years. Five respondents identified as Māori, seven as New Zealand European, one as Cook Island Māori and one as European. Two respondents had completed one to two years of secondary school education, six had completed three or more years of secondary school education, and four had completed University, Waananga or other tertiary study. One respondent did not know what level of formal education they had attained and one preferred not to answer this question.

## GAMBLER OVERVIEW

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### BECOMING A GAMBLER

Respondents were asked to describe how and when they first started using EGMs. It was common for respondents to describe an introduction to gambling that was initiated during their childhood or in early adulthood, often accompanied by family members. Nine out of 14 respondents first used EGMs while out with family members. Five of these respondents were under the age of 18 at the time, while four were adults:

*I started gambling when I was really young, probably at about oh five or six. The first time I had a go on the pokie machine was in a pub with my dad and my uncle. (Respondent 2, male)*

*I just followed suit I suppose, my sisters were playing them and my mum and my dad. (Respondent 4, female)*

*I was 16 maybe 15 years old when I first touched them. I went to the Cozzie club with my Mum I think and snuck off into the pokies with my 21-year-old cousin at the time and he taught me how to play. (Respondent 13, female)*

Four respondents described first using EGMs as adults due to curiosity or boredom, at a time when EGMs could be played for smaller amounts of money. One respondent noted:

*Really just because I have a daughter working in a restaurant, she's living with us and I used to pick her up and they had pokies and sometimes she wasn't ready when I got there so I used to whip into the pokies and play and way back then it was only 20 cents which you put in so that kind of got me started and initially I had a few big wins, yep. (Respondent 14, female)*

One respondent described his first experiences of using EGMs forming part of a broader hedonistic lifestyle he was living, with other people who had a dependency on EGM machines, in the midst of an existing alcohol addiction:

*I came back to New Zealand and I met a lady and I sold cars. She did all the administration work there and she was addicted to the pokies. So the pair of us would have a right old time. I was making good money and my sales manager at the time, he was addicted to them as well. So the three of us would go in and gamble and sometimes we would win, sometimes we'd lose and then her and I would go out. I'd get raving bloody drunk and she'd waste all the money and go and get the car towed, you know we'd do that twice in a week and think that was sort of normal behaviour. (Respondent 11, male)*

## MOTIVATIONS AND FEELINGS ABOUT GAMBLING

Respondents were asked to describe their current and recent gambling behaviour, which helped unpack the meanings they attached to gambling and their key motivations for playing EGMs. It has been commonly assumed that a desire to win money is the most prominent factor in motivating a person to gamble (Clarke, 2004). In this study, the desire to win money was commonly described as a key motivation for playing EGMs:

*It's quite bad to the point where I will use my last \$20 knowing that I've got two weeks to wait for my next pay, yeah just to try and see if I can make a win. (Respondent 12, female)*

*Winning money. It's about winning money to start with. (Respondent 8, male)*

A few respondents commented that having experienced a significant win early in their gambling history cemented their desire to keep coming back to win more money:

*What happened though is I did end up winning a few jackpots and once you've won a few jackpots and you're coming from a place of desperation, you think you can do it again. (Respondent 11, male)*

*I stuck 20 cents in and enjoyed the whole feeling of winning, I won off my first hit and yeah well ever since then I've just pretty much played them. (Respondent 3, female)*

*When I first played it, it was actually, I actually won big yeah the first time. Normally they say the first time you play it, the first time you win, yep that's when I started getting, started hitting my pockets. (Respondent 1, female)*

However, while respondents were strongly motivated by a desire to win money, an overwhelming majority indicated that losing was more common than winning:

*I know I've won the jackpot three times ever since I've played the pokies and that's like hardly anything compared to the times that I've played. (Respondent 9, male)*

*Trying to win. But now and again you will do but probably nine times out of 10 you don't. A fella once said to me 'they're not there to give you money, they're there to take money'. You know and he's right. (Respondent 5, male)*

It has been noted that escape from stress is a motivator among problem gamblers (Clarke, 2004; Clarke et al., 2007). Respondents also frequently described their gambling as a form of stress relief or to 'zone out' from pressures in their lives:

*I can sit there, no one annoys me, no one knows me, I'm in my element especially when I'm winning I feel like a million bucks, yeah it's pretty much it. Yeah. I actually really, really do enjoy it... You're in the zone and it's just no one can even say anything to you because you can't hear them. (Respondent 3, female)*

*...some weird form of relaxation and being on my own so I don't have people bleat in my ear. (Respondent 7, male)*

*I just basically go there, I get in my own zone and it's just me time, you know....Yeah sometimes it's a social thing but sometimes it's just for me. (Respondent 14, female)*

*... it was at a stage in my life that I wasn't that happy and I found that the pokies was you know, it was a distraction for me. So yeah I'd just go and spend all my wages in there. Any little bit of money that I got would go on the pokies. (Respondent 9, male)*

However, while respondents noted that relaxation or 'zoning out' was a key rationale for using the machines, it was clear that the actual experience of using the machines often exacerbated stress:

*When I first get there I do I sort of sit there and think 'aah' you know but sometimes I leave quite agitated. I mean that just depends on how well you do. (Respondent 14, female)*

*...it's good escapism for someone like me, I've got a very addictive personality and when sometimes when I don't like dealing with my emotions and my feelings I'll justify it as time out by playing the pokies and feel worse because I've lost \$60 or whatever the case may be and I've still got to deal with the emotions and feelings I was dealing with anyway and then I've got to throw guilt on top of that as well. (Respondent 11, male)*

Indeed, while the motivation for using the machines was to better their lives through either relaxation, excitement or winning money, the majority of respondents clearly demonstrated the negative impact gambling had on their lives and regret was a key theme that emerged from these accounts:

*Well I think if I could turn back the time I'm sure I wouldn't have done it but you know just I can't imagine how much or what my family could have had if I hadn't have gambled. Yeah I regret it absolutely. (Respondent 13, female)*

*I just used to say to myself and start swearing and say I could kick myself why did I put that much in there when I didn't get anything out of it. (Female respondent 4)*

*Really down, pretty sorry for myself. Always thinking I should have done this, I should have done that. I shouldn't have come here. I should have stopped at blah, blah, blah amount of money. (Respondent 9, male)*

*I always told myself not to do it. I would sit there and wonder what I was doing there but I couldn't walk away. I didn't want to walk away until I got my money back which never ever happened. It was so stupid and it was horrible the feeling that you had afterwards was just, it was just like you wanted to die. That was bad bad bad time in my life. (Respondent 13, female)*

## FREQUENCY OF GAMBLING

Respondents were asked to describe how much of a role gambling had played in their lives since they first started using EGMs. Four respondents described their current use of the machines as problematic. One respondent noted:

*...it's just become an addiction now. Yeah sort of something I really need to cut back on. (Respondent 12, female)*

Eight respondents stated that they had previously had a problem with EGMs but now felt relatively in control of their gambling behaviour.

*Nowadays I'm not so bad, I've become way better in the last four years... When I was real bad I was in a bad point in my life, I was being abused and yeah... Spending every dollar I had on the pokies and alcohol, pokies and alcohol was what I was bad at. I would spend every single dollar, I had nothing for bills and food. I'd have to rely on other family members to feed the kids, look after the kids while I was there, it was horrible. I'd lie to get more money to gamble and to steal if I could. (Respondent 13, female)*

*...it took over most of my time. As soon as I got paid it was like yeah we'll go to the pokies as soon as it opens up... I had a baby quite young and started gambling and then it got to the point where I was gambling everything we had on a weekly basis. (Respondent 10, female)*

*At the moment I do feel like I have more control over it but playing them for 10 years I know it's pretty difficult. (Respondent 8, male)*

One respondent disclosed infrequent use of EGMs and did not identify as having had a problem at any stage in their lives. Another respondent stated that they were in control of their gambling behaviours and did not have a problem. However, they gave responses to other questions that were inconsistent with this statement.

## STRATEGIES TO MANAGE GAMBLING

Respondents were asked to describe any strategies they had in place to manage their gambling. Respondents were mixed in how much control they felt they had over their gambling and in the strategies they used to manage this.

## Perceptions of control

Eight respondents described feeling relatively in control of their gambling, as despite having the occasional lapse, they could generally manage the amount of money and time spent. One respondent noted:

*I go every Wednesday night and I go with \$40 in my wallet that's it, if I win I win if I don't I don't and I walk out and I'm quite satisfied... So I think I manage pretty good at the moment*  
(Respondent 3, female)

Two respondents indicated that they did not feel in control of their current gambling behaviour, with one noting:

*No. I have managed it earlier in my life. When I was a lot more stable but now and with Christmas just around the corner I've sort of just getting more urges to try and fix bills and try and get myself sorted for Christmas.* (Respondent 12, female)

Four respondents indicated that they felt completely in control of their gambling behaviour at the time of the interview.

## Strategies

Respondents described a number of strategies to assist in the management of their gambling. Three respondents described keeping busy with work and family life to distract them so they would not gamble too much. One respondent noted:

*Well what I try and do to manage it is I try to keep myself busy and take all the right actions...what I'll do is I'll come home and I'll rest and I'll do the things to look after myself and then I try and do things around the house.* (Respondent 11, male)

Three respondents stated that they allowed relatives to take control of finances to stop them from overspending. One respondent stated:

*I have a younger sister who's really good with finances so she's always an option for me to keep the money with...If I say 'can you hold this for me for next week?'...If I try and come back for it during that day or you know a bit earlier than what I'd anticipated she's good to tell me 'no'. So she's one of my managing tools.* (Respondent 12, female)

Three respondents referred to setting a cash limit and one respondent strategised by leaving their EFTPOS card at home:

*I'll put \$5 or \$10 in because that's really about it. That's only what I can afford but I also when I was working I would budget say like okay \$40 a week and that's it. And you had to be tough on that. Nine times out of 10 though you spend a little bit more but nothing huge.*  
(Respondent 7, male)

Respondents indicated that their peers could either help or hinder their efforts to manage their gambling behaviour. A previous study found that women with gambling problems were more likely to belong to social networks in which gambling was normalised (Trevorrow & Moore, 1998). In line with this, one respondent noted that in order to manage her gambling she needed to be careful about who she associated with. However, another respondent described actively drawing on peer support in the EGM area as a strategy to help manage her gambling:

*Like Sunday I played there and I had got my money back plus and I said to one of my friends 'what shall I do?' He said 'out now - end of. Otherwise you're going to lose it'. Okay fine. So I had somebody there to encourage me and say 'right you've got your money back plus keep it. That's it'. Otherwise I probably would have been tempted to just sit and play. (Respondent 4, female)*

Four respondents disclosed that while they often tried to set limits for themselves, this often proved difficult. Indeed, while the majority of respondents had strategies to manage their gambling, it was clear that these strategies did not often work:

*I generally try to but it never seems to work that way. I know I spend more than I should be spending you know... I try to go to the machine and take \$40 or \$60 out and leave my card at home but nine times out of 10 I take my card with me, which I shouldn't do – I should leave my card behind. (Respondent 5, male)*

*I think in my head I set a limit of time but I never stick to it you know really. (Respondent 14, female)*

## HELP SEEKING AWARENESS

It was very clear that most respondents were well aware of avenues for support if they ever wanted help to manage their gambling.

*In the venue yes there is an 0800 number you can ring if you find that, and I think that it says that if you think that someone has a problem and you want to help them or if you have a problem and want to help yourself ring the gambling line I think it is or something and I think they put you onto, you can get counselling if you need to. (Respondent 7, male)*

A few respondents had already contacted services or received counselling:

*I rang Gambling Anonymous, went to meetings, I had people ringing me three or four times a day, texting, which has given me a lot of comfort. I had to write down lists of stuff and like for things for me to do during the week and during the night so I wasn't, when I'm not doing anything. (Respondent 3, female)*

*Yes I did go to the Salvation Army a couple of times but I guess I just realised actually that I knew I had a problem but to get talking to someone about it is quite hard. Yep and that's when I self excluded. They put me onto that and then I was good. (Respondent 10, female)*

Only one respondent demonstrated a low level of awareness of where to go if they needed support with their gambling, because they felt that that they did not need to know this information:

*I would never get to that point. I have more self control than that. (Respondent 6, male)*

## STOPPING GAMBLING

A few respondents who identified as having had a gambling problem previously, reflected on the time they had decided to take action to reduce the amount they were using EGMs. The motivation for stopping was described as emerging only when respondents had reached 'rock bottom' - a particularly low point and their gambling was seriously impacting on the rest of their life:

*...when I realised my rent wasn't getting paid. I had to pay extra on top so that extra \$80 I used to play with was now going on my rent arrears, yep. (Respondent 1, female)*

*When I hit rock bottom and I'd lost everything, my car, just about lost my partner at the time but I'm still with him now. Didn't speak to my parents for six or seven months, they pretty much disowned me and my sisters and stuff. So it's funny how it takes for you to hit rock bottom to realise what you've lost... I didn't really know I had a problem until I hit rock bottom. (Respondent 3, female)*

*I went through a bankruptcy which was something that initiated because I couldn't pay my cards off or anything. (Respondent 7, male)*

*I saw the money that I'd wasted on it, got into a lot of debt. I was borrowing money from finance companies and from family. (Respondent 9, male)*

A few other respondents expressed a desire to stop gambling entirely in the near future or to regain some control over their use of EGMs:

*I'd certainly like to be in a situation where I can say to myself 'I'm going to take \$40 out, leave my card at home and get a bit of shopping and a bit of lunch and then use the \$20 left to spend. I'd certainly like to be in that situation where I can do that'. (Respondent 5, male)*

*I don't think gambling has a place in my future. No. I just don't want to do it anymore. (Respondent 8, male)*

*I had too many children you know I was onto my third and you know I lost so much...I'm a lot better but still I would like to get to the point where they're [pokies] non-existent in my life. (Respondent 10, female)*

*I know within my heart and my soul like my drinking I've just got to deal with it one day at a time and not even go in there you know... the deceit that comes with it, you lie to people you know it's the whole thing about it is soul destroying, it destroys your soul it really does.*  
(Respondent 11, male)

## STAFF OVERVIEW

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### TYPES OF VENUE

The 18 staff respondents were recruited from a range of different venues located in Wellington, Christchurch and a provincial area of the North Island. These included restaurant bars, sports bars, and private members' clubs.

Respondents were asked to reflect on the extent to which gambling represented a significant part of the venue. A total of 13 respondents described EGM use as a central part of the venue. A few of these respondents indicated that EGMs were critical to the financial survival of the venue. One respondent noted:

*Without gaming machines this place would close and so would the two other pubs I had. You can't make a living off alcohol any more.* (Staff respondent 6, Christchurch)

Five respondents stated that gambling on EGMs was not a central part of the venue they were working in.

### PROFESSIONAL ROLES

All respondents had a degree of management responsibility in the venue and were directly involved in working within the EGM area. Job titles ranged from duty manager (n=7), general manager (n=6), owner operator (n=2), supervisor (n=1) and food and beverage manager (n=1)

### PERCEPTIONS OF GAMBLING

Respondents were asked to describe how they felt about the gambling that goes on during their work. Staff were relatively mixed in their perceptions of gambling. However, the majority of staff were indifferent to the existence of EGMs in their venue. A few respondents felt there was a 'double standard' in terms of how gambling on EGMs is perceived compared to other forms of gambling such as Lotto and TAB. One respondent was particularly resentful of this, noting:

*I have no problem with them. The only problem I have is just that we've been absolutely hammered by the media and by everyone else thinking that it's really awful* (Staff respondent 1, Wellington)

One Christchurch-based respondent attributed their level of comfort with the EGMs to the fact they had not observed any negative behaviour noting, '*Oh entirely comfortable. I've not seen anything that would make me feel uncomfortable*' (Staff respondent 4, Christchurch).

Five staff members were gamblers themselves but none of these respondents gambled in their workplace.

While the majority of staff were relatively indifferent to gambling on EGMs, seven staff members expressed very negative views about these activities in their workplace. Respondents generally attributed this to their experiences working with EGMs and witnessing the negative consequences of this form of gambling:

*I think pokie machines are pretty expensive. I think...there's a high risk of people spending more than they can...I don't play pokies myself and it's more due to working with them because I just see people spending far more money that I could ever imagine that they'd really be able to afford... Often when people win they've already put in that amount and often when they win, they put it back into the machine. So I think they're pretty addictive. (Staff respondent 2, Wellington )*

*Oh I hate them. They're a pain in the arse... Just the mentality of some people sometimes. You know doing stupid things like cashing out and then putting the money back in and cashing out and putting the money back in, just doing like a cycle over and over again. (Staff respondent 4, Wellington)*

# INTERACTIONS IN THE GAMBLING ENVIRONMENT

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## INTERACTIONS BETWEEN PATRONS

Gambler respondents were asked to describe how much contact they have with other patrons while in the EGM area. Overwhelmingly, respondents described playing the EGMs as a solitary activity:

*Not a lot, you're pretty much zoned out in your own little world. You do get talkative ones that yack and natter away, you be polite and you talk as much as you can but you're generally zoned out into your own little space. (Respondent 7, male)*

*Not really a lot because most people are concentrating on their machines. If you go in there you will see, especially when the jackpot's about to go off and the bar's packed or wherever, everyone's just full concentration on them. (Respondent 9, male)*

A few respondents described feeling irritated when other patrons attempted to interact with them while they were playing the pokies:

*Unless I know someone I quickly say hi and then that's it, I'm in my zone on my machine and that's it. I try not to talk to anyone unless I go with my mother or my sister then we talk amongst ourselves we chitchat when there are other strangers in there... It really irritates me to the point where sometimes I have to say something... say I'm sitting there and I win \$200 or something on a free game or something the lady next to me will say oh congratulations you're very, very lucky and I'll just look at her and just think please just leave me alone, in my mind that's what I'm thinking. (Respondent 3, female)*

Two respondents perceived interaction from other patrons could be deliberate distraction intended to put them off their game, with one noting:

*It's quite a nasty environment. Say for instance if somebody was winning like quite often on their machine other people will come and sit on either side of them...Just to try and think that they could get a bit of luck from that winning machine and the person that's playing it. You will feel a bit of tension from the person that's winning, especially when they stop winning they will start thinking it was the other two taking that luck off them. Yeah so you get a lot of that confrontation. (Respondent 12, female)*

Although staff were not directly asked about interactions between patrons, interviews with staff generally agreed with this finding, with the vast majority of staff noting that patrons playing the EGMs were generally 'zoned in' to the activity with very little social interaction taking place. However, five staff members did comment that there was a social aspect of EGM use, with some patrons interacting with each other rather than the entire focus being on the machine. A previous study found that higher levels of social interaction took place among patrons in club contexts

compared to pubs/bars (Thomas et al., 2010). In line with this, one respondent, working in a club context, noted that a collegial environment was fostered in the premises:

*One thing I've found in the clubs is quite remarkable everyone seems to know everybody, it's very much community-based facility and in a way people are almost looking out for each other, yeah. (Staff respondent 4, Christchurch)*

This type of supportive environment was also described by a gambler respondent, who noted that among his social group there was peer pressure to not gamble too much:

*Yes. Yeah we get, in the time that I've been associating with that particular venue you build up you know a pretty good friendship base and in our circles we've all had particular times like in my situation with my ex partner or with my mate going through hard times and everything where you've been excessively spending money in the pokie room or spending time we do give each other a hard time. Yep, yep. We'll always say 'oh so what did you put in there this time, \$20 eh, yeah did you win?' We just give each other a hard time and we try to say 'hey you know we didn't come here for you to just bugger off to the pokie room for hours on end. We've come here to associate and have as few drinks you know so if you're not going to do that don't bother associating with us'. But that has happened on a few occasions. (Respondent 7, male)*

## INTERACTIONS BETWEEN STAFF AND PATRONS

All respondents, staff and gamblers, were asked to describe the contact they had with each other while in the EGM area. Gambler respondents commented that although they perceived that there was little interaction between patrons, it was common for staff to greet them when they entered an establishment:

*...you just walk in, they say hi...And they're smiling it makes you feel you know welcome and happy. Yep but even though you know the pokies are going to make you miserable later. (Respondent 1, female)*

Respondents indicated that the amount of interaction with staff while using the machines was limited. Generally, respondents commented that they only interacted if staff were in the EGM area to undertake specific tasks such as picking up glasses or if they were withdrawing money at the bar:

*Oh they'll go in and they'll pick up the usually pints and all that, the glasses and everything. I don't really say much to them because you're zoned out with the games, you don't really unless they go oh how's it going, oh you're doing well. You go yeah, yeah about time you know. But no real conversation because again you're pretty much in your own little world. (Respondent 7, male)*

Staff respondents largely agreed with this with staff describing largely spontaneous interactions when undertaking other essential tasks in the gaming area. One respondent noted:

*You talk to them to a certain extent mostly when you're changing the hopper<sup>2</sup> or cancelling credits or paying out a jackpot. Other than that we can't serve drinks in the gaming room, to encourage them and that by law. So we don't spend too much time in there interacting with the customer, only if they need change and servicing the machines. (Staff respondent 5, Wellington)*

While most staff described a very basic and incidental level of interaction with patrons using the EGMs, four staff described making a concerted effort to strike up conversation. One respondent noted:

*I go with in there and am quite social with them as well because I understand what they're there for... I know a lot of them on first name basis and stuff. (Staff respondent 4, provincial North Island area)*

However, it was clear that for gamblers who were 'zoned in' to the machines, deliberate interaction from staff could elicit a negative reaction. One respondent described feeling irritated if staff interacted with them too much:

*...sometimes they will say hi how are you you know and I'll respond. But you only really have contact them if you need to cash, change your money or you've won a jackpot or something, yeah. But I don't actually seek them out to interact with them unless I have to... One or two casinos<sup>3</sup> have staff that stand behind you and make comments... Oh like 'oh you've got games' or 'you're the second person to win big on that' and I just think 'piss off'...they're intruding on my space really when they do that. (Respondent 14, female)*

Indeed, one staff respondent commented that they did not feel comfortable talking to patrons while they were using the EGMs:

*No don't talk to them, they don't want to talk to you. You say how are you going mate, give them some cash out and say don't spend it all. Always tell them that, save some for tomorrow. But you can't really go talking to them while they're playing the machines, they don't want to know you, they don't want to know you. (Christchurch 6)*

Another respondent noted that while they had a considerable amount of social interaction with regular patrons who used EGMs while having a drink at the bar, they did not have much interaction with those who more exclusively used EGMs, noting *'the hard out gamers no we don't have a lot of contact with them, it's very minimal'*. (Staff respondent 1, Christchurch)

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<sup>2</sup> The hopper is the vessel that holds the money inserted into the machine.

<sup>3</sup> This participant referred to pubs, clubs and hotels with pokie machines as 'casinos'.

# HOST RESPONSIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

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## IDENTIFYING PROBLEM GAMBLERS

Staff were asked to describe how they would identify a patron as a problem gambler. It was clear that identifying problem gamblers was a complex process. However, respondents did identify some key factors that had helped them to identify problem gamblers. The most commonly reported indicator was multiple or large cash withdrawals at the bar.

*...the people that come in who have like a hundred dollars or \$200 or \$300 keep coming up and getting it...you know so they come up to us and will take it out of EFTPOS. (Staff respondent 4, provincial North Island area)*

Another factor commonly reported that has been identified in other research was emotional reactions that differed to other gamblers in the venue (Paul Delfabbro, King, & Griffiths, 2012). These reactions included crying, swearing, becoming agitated, or hitting a machine.

*...they're two to three hours on the machines and then they just become agitated and slowly you can see them becoming more irritated, hitting the side of the machine. Yep start hitting the side of the machine, swearing a lot. (Staff respondent 5, Wellington)*

Another indicator described was patrons making disclosures to staff about their gambling, either formally or informally in off the cuff comments about financial loss due to gambling and its related impact on their lives. One respondent noted:

*They might make comments after they're leaving, while they're playing they won't usually say anything to you but when they're leaving... They go 'oh I can't pay rent' or something like that. (Staff respondent 2, Wellington)*

Other factors described by staff included spending long periods of time in the gaming room, walking in and out of the premises to visit the ATM, children being left in cars outside, unusual behaviour such as changing small amounts of change or looking around for coins on the floor, and any out of character behaviour observed among regular patrons.

While respondents did report a number of factors that could help them to identify problem gamblers, it was clear that this was not a clear cut process for staff and there were several barriers to successfully identifying problem gamblers and meeting host responsibility expectations. These barriers are explored in subsequent sections of this report.

## MONITORING THE ENVIRONMENT

Staff respondents were asked to describe how much time they spend in the gaming machine area, what they do while checking the area, and what policy (if any) their venue has to monitor the area in order to check up on people who are using the machines.

All staff respondents acknowledged that they were expected to check the gaming machine area at regular intervals. One respondent noted:

*I think we're supposed to go in there about every 15 minutes, I'm pretty sure so that people don't play like two machines at once and stuff and just to make sure that people who have excluded themselves aren't gaming as well. (Staff respondent 3, Wellington)*

A previous New Zealand-based study found that the main reason staff entered the EGM area was to address issues and service machines (Thomas et al., 2010). In agreement with this, in the current study, monitoring the environment was often couched as a means of checking for rule breaking, such as syndicates, people playing more than one machine, or underage people playing the machines, rather than as a harm minimisation measure. One respondent noted:

*Go and do a sweep so probably every half an hour I'll do a sweep of pushing the chairs in and tidying up and just monitoring who's in there. We've got monitors up there so I'll watch that all the time. So just to watch who's coming and going... watching who's doing what. Because you get the odd person that's got free games and they'll go and play another machine. It's like ah I don't think so I'm just trying to catch them at the moment. (Staff respondent 6, Wellington)*

One respondent, however, described these checks as being specifically for the purpose of harm minimisation, while performing other essential tasks in the process:

*We are hands on is probably the easiest way to say it and by being hands on we look for issues and we look for any problems... we go in there and we do harm minimisation by looking around the room, tidying up the chairs and stuff like that... We also have a policy that they go in and make sure the room is clean and also at all times try and do harm minimisation, you know check and see body language and read body language and just listen basically, so yeah it's part of the job. (Staff respondent 1, provincial North Island area)*

When asked about any specific policies in place within the venue, the majority of respondents referred to requirements set out by their respective gambling trust. However, a few respondents were unable to provide much detail of what this would involve.

*We do, we all have to do that with (Gaming Trust) we just follow all their rules. We have a big folder behind the bar that tells us what we should do and what we shouldn't do and yeah. (Staff respondent 2, Christchurch)*

One respondent reported that while they were not aware of a formal policy in the venue, they were personally committed to monitoring the environment:

*I don't think it's laid down he's never said to me 'hoi get onto controlling the gamblers'. I think it's just part of a host responsibility myself, I know over the years, well as I say you get to know these customers and think well you're doing them a favour if you tell them to slow down. (Staff respondent 6, provincial North Island area)*

## PERCEPTIONS OF HOST RESPONSIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

All staff respondents were asked how they would feel about approaching someone who looked like they might need help with their gambling. The majority of staff respondents indicated that they felt quite uneasy about this.

*I personally don't feel comfortable about it. I will do it because it's my job but...I mean I think I'd be quite annoyed if somebody came up to me and says 'hey you know I think you're betting too much or I think you've been playing too long'. (Staff respondent 3, Christchurch)*

Another staff respondent, an owner operator, argued that host responsibility requirements were unrealistic and placed an unfair expectation on staff:

*I don't have time for them to stand in a room and listen to guys having conversations about oh my god this is my last dollar but problem gamblers don't say that. Problem gamblers keep to themselves, they don't interact with other people. How can you go up to someone and say 'sorry mate I think you've got a problem' you shouldn't be in here any more. Why is it up to us do you know what I'm saying. (Staff respondent 1, Wellington)*

Overall, staff were not confident about the likely outcome of approaching a patron about their gambling and commonly expressed a fatalistic view that gamblers would become embarrassed and simply leave and go to another venue. This outcome was partly reflected in the experiences of staff who described times when they had intervened.

*I've spoken to the woman that had cried, that was another time, at the machine but they get pretty embarrassed and you don't see them again... Well I gave her a card and I said like you know if you want to have a talk about it you know just let me know or you can call these people. But it's very embarrassing and she didn't say much and she left very quickly. (Staff respondent 2, Wellington)*

*Normally what happens is somebody would come in on a certain day and then they won't come in the next couple of days because they don't want to feel embarrassed about coming in and gambling... People get embarrassed if they've got a problem. (Staff respondent 4, provincial North Island area)*

Gambler respondents were also asked how they would feel about being approached, and in line with this, the majority were negative about the idea of a staff member checking in with them about their gambling. Embarrassment, humiliation and anger were key reactions noted.

*I'd probably figure it was a little bit strange. I mean it's good you're drinking in the bar and they come and talk to you but if you're playing the pokies...Drinking's a social thing, pokies is sort of you're on the machine thing... I'd probably think who are you? You know, what's it to do with you?... Now I would probably leave because I'd think well that's you know a stranger saying that to me. If it was me back you know when I was playing them all the time I would have probably said 'who the hell are you?' (Respondent 9, male)*

*I would have been like 'who the hell do you think you are'. It's for me to judge and for me to know if I have the problem or not... Because you know yourself when you have a problem or if you don't and until I hit rock bottom and lost all my family for nearly a year that was enough to make me realise. (Respondent 3, female)*

*I don't like the fact that it's their judgement call. You know because I could be sitting here and I might potentially be able to spend \$400 and the person next to me might be a beneficiary who really shouldn't be there because they've got no money but it's not up to staff to decide who they should tap on the shoulder... I've never seen any staff anywhere do that, I've been playing for 20 years. Do they do it ever? But it's still not their call I don't think, I know they're trained to spot things you know but they don't go with it... if they approached me I would actually tell them to piss off ...for me personally it would be a real intrusion on my privacy you know and no one else had the right to make the call about how much time I spend doing anything. (Respondent 14, female)*

A few respondents were more pragmatic about this and demonstrated an appreciation of the purpose of interventions. One respondent noted, '*I probably wouldn't, I'd probably be grateful if somebody stopped me before I'd done stupid things*' (Respondent 12, female). Another respondent commented that they understood intervening was simply part of the job for staff working in gambling environments.

*Oh no fair enough. Yeah, yeah that's their job. It's no different than them refusing me alcohol if they thought that I was intoxicated so I see it that way I don't take that sort of thing personally. But you know I would clearly say that some people do take exception to it, you've just got to remember those guys are there and they're doing a job and that's part of their job. (Respondent 7, male)*

## APPROACHES

A number of staff described how they would go about approaching someone if they thought they had a problem with gambling. Most respondents described using an indirect and non-

confrontational approach, typically describing going into the EGM area for another reason and then engaging in casual conversation with patrons. Two respondents described making 'small talk' with patrons withdrawing money in an attempt to make them think about their gambling behaviour at that moment:

*Like when people get money out and stuff I always ask them how they've been going that day and if they, like if I know them quite well then I ask them if they've been anywhere else and stuff...I always ask them kind just so that they might think 'oh yeah how long have I been going?'. (Staff respondent 3, Wellington)*

*I mean we pass comment all the time, 'god you still here?' You know stuff like that as a subtle way of you know saying 'well you've been here a wee while' (Staff respondent 3, Christchurch)*

Another staff respondent described using a more indirect approach:

*...just like grab a brochure and just leave it beside the machine and they'll pick it up and think oh okay you know. That's the easiest thing to do. (Staff respondent 6, Wellington)*

However, another respondent preferred to be direct in their approach and described actively telling patrons that they were unlikely to win when gambling:

*[They said]...'Oh I put \$100 into this machine and I haven't won anything'. And I'm like 'yeah and, that's what they're built for'. You know straight up tell them they're built to lose you know and I tell them...'you're not going to win'. They're not built to win, you know? (Staff respondent 4, provincial North Island area)*

Another respondent described questioning patrons withdrawing money from EFTPOS:

*...we have had the odd person that's like got quite a lot of money out, or tried to get quite a lot of money out and we'll question what they're doing. Just say you know 'that's huge, like are you sure you really want to be doing that?' (Staff respondent 2, Christchurch)*

A few staff described doing additional things in their venue to assist people who were struggling with their gambling. This often involved regular patrons who had built up a relationship with staff and had approached staff for support. One respondent described keeping a 'float' of money for a patron to access when they wanted to use the machines:

*...we have another guy and he has like a little bag of money that we have in the till for him and so when he comes in we give him like the amount that he asks for and then he, if he like wins he puts some back in the bag so that he, it's kind of like his own little pokie thing yeah so he doesn't spend like all his money, yeah. (Staff respondent 3, Wellington)*

The same respondent described helping another patron to manage the amount of money they spent on the machines:

*...a guy, I won't name him, but he just gets \$20 out and he gets me to look after his wallet while he goes into the pokies so that he doesn't put any more in. When he comes back out I would just give him his wallet but I would make sure that he doesn't go back in. (Staff respondent 3, Wellington)*

Another respondent described helping a patron to manage the limits they placed on their own spending:

*...we've got one guy here who won't let us give him \$20 notes he'll only take like, he'll only use his change because he gets \$2 in his change. He'll only use \$2 coins, he goes, he said 'if you ever see me putting a note in a machine give me a tap on the head'. But his thing is, they like to limit themselves more than actually exclude themselves, and they like us to keep an eye on them to do that. I would actually tap him on the ear if I saw him trying to put a \$20 note in, it's like 'you've got your thing I'm here to watch that'. (Staff respondent 1, Christchurch)*

Another respondent described helping a patron to manage their gambling by suggesting alternative activities for them to engage in as a distraction from the machines:

*I mean there's one guy that comes into the bar on a regular basis like all the time and he always tries to not play the pokies and then he always happens to get in there, chuck \$60 or \$80 in there sort of thing once in a while and then I normally come in. I might say 'don't do any more just go have a beer, watch some sport like there's some rugby on - I'll chuck that on for you' sort of thing and he goes away and watches the rugby and leaves. (Staff respondent 4, provincial North Island area)*

A few other respondents noted that there was an informal limit on EFTPOS withdrawals that would be imposed if it was felt that a particular patron had spent too much:

*They're allowed to get cash out [but] there's a limit as to what they're allowed to get out. And quite often yeah if I feel like somebody's had their limit then I won't allow them any more. But I'll just say it's because we need to keep our cash. (Staff respondent 5, Christchurch)*

Gambler respondents were also asked to describe what would be the best way for a staff member to check in with them about their gambling. Only one respondent had knowingly experienced a staff member checking in with them. They noted:

*One time in Auckland actually a lady asked me because I was withdrawing money and she said 'I think you've had your limit for the day'. Yep. I sort of brushed her off. I lost all my money that day too. (Respondent 13, female)*

However another respondent described an interaction with a staff member that was not specifically defined as 'checking in' but appeared to represent these circumstances:

*If it's not busy in there one of the managers will come in and say 'oh how are you doing? Oh we're not?' Oh okay. And then one of the manageress's in particular will say to me 'how much have you taken in there?' And I'll say how much I've got in there...'Okay do you really need to go back?' And I go 'no'. Okay then. So it's like they encourage me as well not to kind of always go back in there if I haven't come out with anything, yep. (Respondent 4, female)*

Gambler respondents offered suggestions about what the best approach would be for someone to check in with them about their gambling. One respondent suggested a direct approach but stressed that the way in which the message was delivered was the critical point:

*...if they notice someone who is going up on a regular basis and drawing \$60 and regoing up again to maybe say hey look you know you seem to have put a lot of money in that machine do you think it's time to call it a day, you know. If it's done the right way the person will buy this if they do it the right way, if they're sincere and genuine and caring about it, like I said it could make a difference. (Respondent 11, male)*

Another respondent suggested that a discreet approach, emphasising that this was not an attack on this individual but rather a part of the job, was important to ensure that the intervention was respectful:

*I don't think going into the pokie rooms and doing it because I think that's impersonal. What you're doing is you're outlining someone's problem to everyone else in that room, you're better when they come out to pull them aside and say oh can I have a chat with you and say hey look you know I think, I think you've had enough for the day, it's my job and you know unfortunately I can't, I can't allow you to go. I think that's probably the best approach, yeah a one on one. (Respondent 7, male)*

For another respondent, a less direct approach was preferred. This respondent noted that staff asking simple questions about their life could help break the 'zoned in' mentality that is central to their gambling and make them think about what they are doing:

*I guess if they're sort of did acknowledge like 'oh have you finished work?', oh you know just sort of pry into my business to sort of open me up a bit. I guess that would work, yep. Just sort of shed some light and wake me up a bit because you're always in a zone mentality of trying to make a win when you're in there. So I guess if someone could try and beat that it could help. (Respondent 12, female)*

One respondent commented that their reaction to an approach would depend on the relationship they had built with the particular staff member.

*Well maybe it would depend on what sort of a mood I was in. I might actually say 'oh ok well actually it's none of your business'... but if you have been a few times and you know them and they're telling you then you'd probably think oh well I'll just leave it. They maybe intend*

*to help you, sort of stuff. No I don't think that really I'd be annoyed... it would depend on maybe how long you have known the person and your relationship with the person to see what my reaction would be. (Respondent 5, male)*

## BARRIERS

Previous studies have found that staff are often reluctant to intervene when they think a patron could have a problem with their gambling (Hing & Nuske, 2011). In line with this, interviews with staff respondents revealed a number of barriers to performing host responsibility requirements. One barrier described was social embarrassment and awkwardness. One respondent explained that the personal nature of gambling and the 'zoned out' atmosphere made it awkward to check in with patrons:

*...it's not like you really get the opportunity to talk about anybody's problems because they're only coming in and people that go into the pokies often don't want to be spoken to. It's kind of quite personal thing that people go in and chill out. A lot of people do that anyway, go in to relax or whatever like that. So yeah it's not really practice that everybody's talking about gambling yeah. (Staff respondent 2, Wellington)*

Another respondent explained that the risk of getting it wrong made them reluctant to intervene:

*...I don't want to make a mistake with someone as I said just coming in and spending a hundred bucks every week or three times a week and that's his way of letting go you know? (Staff respondent 1, Wellington)*

For one respondent the possibility of not being taken seriously by patrons was described as a barrier:

*...I can't really go in there and say 'hey guys you know you guys are gambling too much'. They'd laugh at me. (Staff respondent 4, provincial North Island area)*

A fear of incorrectly identifying someone as a problem gambler was a barrier commonly described by staff. It was clear that while staff were aware of potential indicators of 'problem gambling', identifying problem gamblers was a very complex process. The difficulty of ascertaining the true circumstances of an individual patron was the most significant barrier described by respondents.

One staff respondent described the difficulties associated with identifying problem gamblers without getting to know patrons personally:

*I've had a woman who kind of looked, she didn't look that great but her hair was always a bit wiry and stuff like that but her husband's actually quite well off and she could afford to do that...but if I didn't approach her and talk to her about it I wouldn't have known that...she just looked the way she did because she felt like it pretty much, couldn't be bothered showering or something...But then you've got people I know of a woman that comes in here*

*and she's got perfect makeup and her hair's perfect and everything like that but she's just a, like she doesn't actually have that much money.... You can't judge people like that unless you actually know anything about them personally. (Staff respondent 1, Christchurch)*

Indeed another staff respondent described a situation that they had misjudged. They, therefore, had learned to ignore 'the front' and trust their instincts about whether or not to check in with a patron about their gambling:

*...they were always very well presented but all the money they were spending was stolen. But they looked like an executive - you just would not have known. So I've learned to ignore the front that's put on. If it doesn't feel right it's probably not. So if someone came in dressed in a suit spent \$500 in half an hour and they spend another \$500 I'd be thinking something's not quite right. (Staff respondent 4, Christchurch)*

The process of identifying problem gamblers was, therefore, complicated by a number of variables that created ambiguity over whether or not patrons were in control of their behaviour.

A previous study found that staff were apprehensive about approaching patrons due to the risk of being confronted with anger, abuse or aggression (Hing & Nuske, 2011). In agreement with this finding, a few staff respondents in this study were also troubled by the risk of intimidation:

*The trouble is when you approach them especially [local area] you could have got a bloody hiding for a start and you're not going to get him back if you tell him the wrong way. But you're still trying to tell him and they don't always like that do they? (Staff respondent 6, provincial North Island area)*

*...it's hard if we're going to offend them... I've been called that many names nothing really phases me anymore. (Staff respondent 3, provincial North Island area)*

While intimidation was described as a barrier by a few respondents, the majority of staff did not describe this as a significant barrier to intervening if they had concerns about a patron:

*Anger, anger's one that you don't really want to feel... because I've worked in them quite a while I probably wouldn't have too much of a problem with that because I can kind of see that that, the need for it is probably stronger than my fear of getting something thrown back at me or them saying something to me. (Staff respondent 2, Wellington)*

A further barrier to effectively performing host responsibility requirements was the tension that exists between minimising gambling harm while safeguarding the financial survival of the business and its employees. Staff respondents were clearly aware of this and had to walk a challenging line when checking in with patrons about their gambling. One respondent noted:

*If I just said to you 'hey you're not going to keep spending money like that' and if I upset you then you'd stop coming in. The boss would be wanting to know why wasn't X coming in*

any more. 'Oh I told her not to gamble'. See now you don't want that do you? (Staff respondent 6, provincial North Island area)

Another respondent noted that a bad reaction to an intervention could result in patrons not returning to the venue, which could have a negative impact on long-term revenue:

*Bad customer service from me means no business... You can be rude to them but then they don't come in and your profits drop and you know so very, very hard.* (Staff respondent 1, Wellington)

It was clear that whilst the majority of staff were committed to actively preventing gambling harm, they were also aware that the EGMs represented a key part of their role. This, therefore, created a dilemma for staff. One respondent, however, had an alternative view on this issue and argued that visible gambling harm created more damage to the venue:

*...it will cause damage to your business if people who are regularly in there have issues with gambling... it's upsetting for other people to see people in that situation, not generally the other pokie users but people who are in there, there is a sense of social well people think they're morally corrupt to start with right. So if you see someone who's upset because they're using the pokies then come out and start swearing and shouting it's affecting them, it affects people in the bar, people in the bar that don't want to have to be involved in, they want to be in a relaxed environment, they don't generally want to see what they see as 'the other side' of the business.* (Staff respondent 5, Wellington)

## OVERCOMING BARRIERS

Responses from both gamblers and staff interviewed indicate that a fundamental factor to overcoming these barriers is getting to know patrons and building relationships with them. In line with the findings of other studies, getting to know patrons and fostering an environment in which there are regular patrons appeared to make it easier for staff to intervene (Delfabbro, et al., 2012). One respondent noted:

*I did say to this older woman it was like 'I'm a little bit worried about how much you are putting in there, I know you don't work...and you've got your family to support and stuff'. And it was actually just friendly because I had been friendly with her in the past, if you're just friendly with them and sort of make them aware that you have noticed they will pull back a wee bit.* (Staff respondent 1, Christchurch)

It was also noted that getting to know patrons personally made it easier to ascertain whether someone had a problem since staff could get to know their regular habits. One respondent noted:

*And you know that they're doing something sort of out of the ordinary, well not out of the ordinary but something different to what they've normally been doing, they normally might*

*come in and spend \$40 or \$50 but if they're spending a couple of hundred something's going on.* (Staff respondent 6, Provincial North Island area)

Another respondent noted in a members' club environment where there are groups of regular patrons, these relationships between patrons could mean that staff do not have to intervene since patrons would 'police' each other's behaviour:

*...they'll say 'oh gee Jim's behaviour's shifted today he's spent a couple of hundred bucks'. You'll hear those little anecdotal comments or other members will spot it and they talk to someone and before they know it they've been spoken to, it hasn't even required staff intervention. You do hear stories like that.* (Staff respondent 4, Christchurch)

However, while building close relationships with patrons was clearly an important factor in overcoming barriers to approaching gamblers, it was also clear that there were also tensions for staff doing this. While building relationships with patrons was important, it was also clear that staff were not expected to perform a counselling role. One respondent noted:

*I said come on come and have a coffee what's the matter. And he goes oh just they piss me off it hasn't paid me out da, da, da and you know there's other reasons to it but you're trying to get to him and say look this isn't the be all and end all. It's not about the money. You know it's just put it in you're going to lose sooner or later and you're trying to talk to them like a normal person and we aren't supposed to, you know we aren't qualified.* (Staff respondent 1, provincial North Island area)

Another respondent noted:

*And you kind of feel like you have to be a counsellor. Like because I've done all those problem gambling courses and stuff like that, and it's like whenever I go to one I've done most of them over the years, whenever you've done one it's like where do you draw the line of being someone's counsellor and then just a venue.* (Staff respondent 1, Christchurch)

## TRAINING

All staff respondents were asked whether they had received any training on host responsibility and to describe what this training involved.

All but one respondent had completed host responsibility training with their respective trust. The majority of staff described having completed the training once when they had first started working at the venue.

*We do have harm minimisation training which is probably about an hour or so, maybe a bit more I haven't done one for quite a while because when you start working the pokies I think it's required or practice of whatever Trust is running the pokie machines but you're taught to really keep an eye out. If somebody cries at a machine or someone gets angry at a machine*

*and you're encouraged to go up and give them a card saying the gambling helpline, or if it's somebody that you know and you sort of notice over time that they're not in a good place.*  
(Staff respondent 2, Wellington)

Overall, respondents appeared satisfied with the content of the training. However, one respondent felt that the scenarios used were unrealistic and

*...it was a bit over the top... Like they were trying to do the most extreme example I guess of when you should go up and approach somebody but you hardly ever, well I've never come across that situation before.* (Staff respondent 4, Wellington)

Two respondents felt that the training could be more extensive and updated to provide new examples:

*I do think maybe it could be a bit more extensive, I think especially for younger staff... I don't know maybe some sort of guide like a guidebook or something. Something that they could have that when they've got a question they can just go out and have a wee read about it. But I do think the training's quite short. But they're trying to preserve, because obviously training's done inhouse so they're trying to preserve our wages and I can kind of, I get that but it could be a bit longer.*(Staff respondent 5, Christchurch)

*...a lot of it is personal experience, you need to actually experience it yourself to I mean the videos are pretty hilarious. If you can equate it to a situation that you've had and then equate it to a situation like you're in such and such certain situation you remember back to the video or remember back to the course or something like that, that is good. But I don't know they just need to maybe make more or something. There's no new information in any of them.* (Staff respondent 1, Christchurch)

A few staff also noted that the ability to carry out these activities successfully largely relied on personality and experience, with one respondent noting, *'you just have that gift to actually do it'*. Another respondent had not completed the host responsibility training but felt that he had learned through experience, noting:

*I mean I might not have had the training but I've learned myself to be careful with your approach or shut your mouth and I never shut my mouth. But well harm minimisation... This girl come in once before oh from DIA<sup>4</sup>, well she give me a blasting. But I hadn't had any training about harm minimisation as such. I've just learned it over experience you know?*  
(Staff respondent 6, provincial North Island area 6)

One respondent felt that the training provided by the trust was adequate, but felt that Department of Internal Affairs requirements put too much pressure on staff, noting:

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<sup>4</sup> Department of Internal Affairs

*Well you get told the basic fundamentals in other words you get told what is required right, what is required by not just the Trust because the Trust obviously has policies...And then of course we go over the DIA side of things, what the DIA's expectation is which I believe shoots the other programme, the other side of the course out the back door because one minute people are getting warm and fuzzy about how they can do this and then the next minute they are being told what the expectations from the DIA is. And everyone just goes fuck - are you kidding me? It puts a lot of weight on individuals' shoulders. (Staff respondent 2, provincial North Island area)*

Another respondent felt that a uniform approach between the societies would help ensure more consistency in the training provided:

*Each society is a little different whereas I think they should actually look at a big uniformed society...With gambling it's a little bit ambiguous from society to society. So if they sort of came up with one big policy on what's expected it would be a lot easier... The DIA they regulate all this, they're the ones that should come to us and they should hold the seminars for free and tell us how we should be doing it. (Staff respondent 1, Wellington)*

## FUTURE CHANGE

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All respondents were asked about any changes they would like to see that could help make gambling environments safer, or in the case of staff respondents, make it easier to speak to someone who may need help to manage their gambling. Respondents offered a diverse range of suggested changes that could be implemented at a venue or government level.

## VISUAL MATERIALS

The availability and design of visual materials on gambling harms and support services was an area that respondents were specifically prompted on. Staff respondents were, overall, sceptical about the impact of visual materials on reaching problem gamblers:

*...we give them a leaflet they're not going to read it you know it's just more wasted paper.*  
(Staff respondent 1, Wellington)

*I think if you plaster the wall they still won't see them.* (Staff respondent 4, Wellington)

However one staff respondent commented that more visual material would be helpful, noting that this would create '*more awareness that we're here to help them as well if they need it*' (Staff respondent 3, Provincial North Island area).

Another staff respondent felt that some visual materials outlining host responsibility to patrons would be helpful:

*And maybe even I think it would be good for people who play the pokies to get a sense of that we are, we are aware and this is what we are trained to do you know so that they know that we have had training and we know what to look for. Kind of like intoxication, you know you have notices up 'no intoxicated people'.* (Staff respondent 5, Christchurch)

The majority of gambler respondents were relatively indifferent about visual materials and a few respondents were overtly sceptical about the value of these resources:

*They do have signage on the door saying you know if you think you need help for gamblers anonymous and all that sort of stuff – they do have that there. They have all that information... What more stuff could you put in? You already have pamphlets and stuff and a notice on the door with like 'you know if you have a gambling problem this is who you ring'. What more can you do?* (Respondent 5, male)

*No I don't think it would make any difference really because most people, most people don't take much notice of those, they know, they go in there, they know what they're doing...I don't think a lot of people really take notice of it. I don't think there's much more you can do. (Respondent 7, male)*

*Honestly I don't think people would read what's on the boards... there is gaming responsibly signs but...I don't think they apply to me. (Respondent 14, female)*

However, two respondents reported that they had sought help for their gambling after seeing information on the 0800 support number in a venue. A few respondents also offered suggestions regarding the design of visual materials. One respondent felt that these materials could be bigger:

*I know that they have the numbers there if you have a problem with your gambling you ring this number but like maybe like they might need to make them more bold or more like attractive, not just like you know just a little thing in the corner if you have a problem with gambling you know you ring up. (Respondent 2, male)*

The same respondent felt that more images would be helpful, in addition to an eye catching slogan to make people think about what they are doing:

*Maybe like if they had some sort of picture you know like this is how much you've wasted on you know, like sort of pictures to put you off sort of like smoking. Or yeah some sort of reminder or something, eh you know...Maybe something like just like is this your last \$20 you know like something like that's really going to be eye catching you know, not just like... 'is gambling a problem?' You know? Be a bit more like sort of catchy, yeah. (Respondent 2, male)*

Another respondent invoked a similar view, noting that thought-provoking messaging could help:

*I suppose having more posters, like asking questions like why are you gambling or because a lot of people, I know myself they're gambling because they're lacking something in life. You know they're unhappy in some way, well I know from myself and I'm sure that's what's driving people that gamble, I'm almost certain of it like the people I know. I know it's because, I don't know because, but I know that they're lacking something and they're not entirely happy with life. (Respondent 9, male)*

One respondent felt that an image from *'the outside world... Maybe some kids playing in a park or something'* would help to catch the attention of gamblers.

Another respondent felt that existing booklets did not have much impact but suggested that it would be more useful if the information appeared on the screen of the machine instead:

*You notice all the booklets that say how is your gambling affecting you and it just passes by, I guess not have a thought not while you're playing there's these screens that pop up and show you how much you've put in, what time you started to play and what time it was then and your balance of funds available, so that's a little breather gap from pushing buttons. I guess if they showed like some adverts on problem gambling it could help as well... Yes sort of like hold up, been playing I guess stupidly over the last half an hour and give you a little breather like because you have to physically stop and wait for the screen to disappear before you commence your playing again. (Respondent 12, female)*

## VENUE LEVEL CHANGE

A few respondents suggested changes that could be implemented at a venue level. These changes related to the gaming room environment and access to money at the bar.

### **Environmental**

One gambler respondent suggested that creating more light in the venue would open up the space and remind patrons of the outside world beyond the pokie room:

*It's such dark gloomy places, they should put windows in them or even skylights in them... If some people could see the outside world because when you're in there it's like nothing else exists I suppose that's what they want it to be.... if they just brighten the place up a bit you know. Like just so you can have a peek of the outside world not having to be in that dark room and thinking that's all there is. (Respondent 13, female)*

This response is in agreement with problem gamblers interviewed for a previous New Zealand-based study, who indicated that dark lighting allowed them to 'zone out' and that increasing the brightness of the room through natural light would assist as a time cue (Thomas et al., 2010).

### **Limiting EFTPOS withdrawals**

A staff respondent noted that they thought it would be beneficial to stop allowing EFTPOS withdrawals at the bar so that patrons would have to put more thought into the amounts of money they were spending:

*I wanted to stop giving out cash for pokies at the bar which would mean that they had to actually leave the venue, go to the ATM and come back which makes it more effort for them*

*but also could give them more time between gaming. So maybe I think like, well they'd actually be able to see their balance at the ATM and realise that they actually can't afford to come back in, but it's so accessible. Like the bar's right there and they can just come up and keep on getting hundreds of dollars like within 10 metres of the pokies and just go straight back in. So it mightn't have been helpful for them to like leave the venue and have like a little break and then they might not come back. But they don't want to stop giving out cash at the bar. (Staff respondent 3, Wellington)*

Another staff respondent noted:

*What we already do with not giving out too much cash in the venue, everyone should do that. I mean you're not a bank, why should you give out \$200 and stuff like that. It should be EFTPOS cash out transactions should be \$100. I think that's fantastic, that's one of the things I really like about this one, this place they already had that in place before I got here. (Staff respondent 1, Christchurch)*

## REGULATORY CHANGE

A number of the suggestions made by staff and gambler respondents relate to regulatory change. These included time restrictions, restrictions on advertising, restricting the number of machines or venues and regulatory leadership.

### **Time restrictions**

A few respondents commented that time restrictions in terms of how long venues can open for would be helpful to ensure that people cannot spend all of their day playing the machines:

*I just think time restrictions like the opening hours now be so open, you know like sometimes the rooms can't shut till midnight and I just think that's too much. They open first thing in the morning you know like they open at – our one's 11 till whatever time, it changes every day of the week – I think every day it should be 12 till seven, 12 to six. You know so that the after work people can't go or you know beneficiaries like they can't come before lunch time they've only that small gap, just make it harder for everybody to get to them. (Respondent 10, female)*

*I thought of something like time limits... Maybe yeah time limits being in the venue not so much on a machine but and then not having them open as often. They used to open at 9 o'clock now they open at 10 so you've still got that wait you know, so maybe opening at lunch time till like three hours closing that would be quite helpful because then people*

*would know that they've got more to do with their time rather than wait around.*

(Respondent 12, female)

## **Advertising restrictions**

One respondent felt that there should be more restrictions on advertising both outside and inside of the venue to remove the temptation to gamble:

*I think the best idea is get rid of that signage, get rid...the pokie room signs that go out on the roads, any signage that's advertising it on the outside of the building like 'TAB blah, blah, blah'... People should know if they want to go gambling they should know or find out where these places are - they shouldn't be advertised...I think definitely that big sign because at that particular establishment that I talked about earlier there's one in the pub where just along from the TV so it's in your face all the time and it's going up [the jackpot]. Oh it's \$800 or it's \$965, oh it's \$966 now so you think 'oh you know I might go and have a quick'...It's subliminal. It just sits there and you can't help but bloody look at the thing, it's flashing at your, so take them down.... They should just outlaw it, no advertising.*

(Respondent 7, male)

## **Restricting the number of machines and/or venues**

A few respondents stated that reducing the number of machines or venues would help decrease gambling harms. This view was more common among gambler respondents. One respondent noted that it was difficult to find a venue without machines and, as such, using the machines had become the norm rather than an occasional activity:

*...it's refreshing to find a pub that doesn't have pokies and for me personally if I'm in an hotel where there's no pokies I just think 'oh yes' because it's not going to, I can focus on kind of what I'm there for... Fewer machines, fewer venues. Because 20 years ago there wasn't so many to me it was like oh it's a bit of a treat, I'll go to the pokies but it's become not so much of a treat more of a part of life.* (Respondent 14, female)

Another gambler respondent invoked a similar view:

*I suppose they could like reduce the amount of pokie outlets they have because there are far too many. I mean you can't go to a bar these days and have a drink without a pokie machine being there.* (Respondent 9, male)

A few gambler respondents felt even more strongly about this and indicated that they would be in support of removing EGMs entirely from pubs and clubs:

*Best thing is for them to remove the machines, there's no need for them. I mean as a society that would be the best thing that they could do.* (Respondent 11, male)

Although this viewpoint was more common among gamblers than staff, four staff respondents did support either a reduction or complete removal of machines. One respondent noted:

*I would love the pokies just to be gone completely out of society... I don't think the government can really do that much about it except cut the amount of pokie machines in each outlet. (Staff respondent 4, Provincial North Island area)*

Another staff respondent felt that reducing the number of machines would be beneficial. However they noted that this would have a negative impact on the financial sustainability of businesses:

*I'd say probably cutting down the amount of venues would be good you know for that side of things but then those venues won't survive without them. Without the set payment that they get every week just to help run them. (Staff respondent 4, Wellington)*

## **Self-regulation**

Two staff respondents commented that a swipe card system where patrons could request restrictions on their access would be useful as a tool to help people to manage their gambling:

*I wanted to introduce a swipe card and so everybody came in with a card and so for you to go in you just swipe your card and walked in and if anybody had any issues they could come to us and say look it's Christmas I don't need to be in there can you cancel my card for three weeks, four weeks or whatever and we just go bang, bang, bang and deactivate it and they can keep it, walk away. So it put actually the onus back on them. (Staff respondent 1, provincial North Island area)*

Another respondent commented that a pre-commitment card system that would allow patrons to monitor their own use of the machines would be beneficial:

*I think one tool that would be handy but I don't believe it should be compulsory would be carded play... a loyalty card that does track your play. So if you've got your card in the machine it will just record what you've been doing. I think something similar to that as an optional tool if someone wants to have a card they can. (Staff respondent 4, Christchurch)*

Pre-commitment schemes such as this have been trialled in recent years in various parts of Australia and formally introduced in the state of Victoria in 2013.

## **Leadership and regulation**

A few staff respondents referred to general changes they would like to see in terms of regulation and leadership. One respondent commented that they felt a more positive working relationship with DIA would be helpful, noting:

*Some of the rules that DIA and governance around I think are silly. I think the DIA look at us waiting for us to fall over or make a mistake but they don't work with us. They're not actually interested in going forward, they're just more interested in being a policeman. (Staff respondent 1, provincial North Island area)*

Another staff respondent commented that clear and consistent rules would assist them with host responsibility:

*I think better [rules]...Some of the rules like some of the gambling rules a lot of it's quite grey I find. Like we kind of have to come up with our own total of how much cash they're allowed out, just stuff like that. (Staff respondent 5, Christchurch)*

A similar view was expressed by another staff respondent, who noted that a consistent policy would be helpful with some clearer guidance:

*...if they sort of came up with one big policy on what's expected it would be a lot easier... I think there are guidelines but it's still 'this is what we expect from you, this is how you should do it'... And you know people the DIA they regulate all this, they're the ones that should come to us and they should hold the seminars for free and tell us how we should be doing it. (Staff respondent 1, Wellington)*

One staff respondent, however, expressed a cautious view about more stringent regulation, noting:

*I mean it's a hard one because it will basically draw the line between people being able to have freedom in society to go out and spend money as they want or regulating it to a point where you just wouldn't go do it anymore because what's the point? (Staff respondent 5, Wellington)*

One gambler respondent made a general comment in favour of more rigorous regulation:

*I think from personally I think there's got to be something in place to help people because so many of them are, so many people are fucked. You know like there needs to be something that clubs, venues that offer something more - not just a card and that. I think we've got to take more responsibility for what we're doing to families and stuff. Not like it's us personally but the Internal Affairs or the Foundations need to have more available for people, yep. The counselling's never enough there's got to be limits on how long, how much and it's got to be done properly. If that means that someone travels to 20 different venues a day well so be it, but it makes it harder for them to do it. (Respondent 10, female)*

Another gambler respondent invoked a similar view that stronger leadership was required, and felt that more activism in the community to raise awareness of gambling harms was needed:

*I personally think it's got to come from the government somewhere along the line or a general petition from the general community to actually bar them and get petitions going and really put in the petition the damage it's really causing and not mincing words with it and get the community behind it, really get the community to sign it, you know petition against them. I would say that would be the best way to go. (Respondent 11, male)*

## DISCUSSION

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This research involved 32 semi-structured interviews with staff and patrons of Class 4 gambling venues, with the purpose of exploring perceptions and experiences of host responsibility requirements. The findings are largely consistent with similar studies conducted overseas. However, the results reveal a number of important issues in the New Zealand context.

It was clear throughout interviews with staff respondents that identifying problem gamblers and deciding when and how to make an approach is a complex process. Several staff respondents described situations they had encountered where they had misjudged a situation and it was clear that social embarrassment was a considerable barrier to approaching patrons. There was also a fear that patrons might react badly to being approached and that this places considerable pressure on staff to undertake a task that they considered to be potentially risky and sensitive. Only one gambler interviewed for this research had ever knowingly been approached by a staff member to check in with them about their gambling, yet the majority of participants identified as having had a gambling problem at some point in their lives. This perhaps reflects, in part, the reluctance of staff to intervene. The difficulties staff experience identifying problem gamblers and making an approach must be considered carefully in the context of future support and training for staff working in the EGM environment.

It is important to note that gamblers interviewed for this project predominantly responded negatively to the prospect of being approached by a staff member to check in with them about their gambling. Embarrassment, humiliation and anger were common reactions described. It was clear that several respondents had no expectation that staff would ever approach them, and were affronted by the possibility that they might. For the majority of these respondents, gambling was a solitary activity that they engaged in to 'zone out'. This was not a time during which they welcomed interaction with others. This raises a significant issue. If host responsibility measures are to be successful, it is crucial that staff feel confident and equipped to undertake these tasks. However, these approaches will be fruitless if patrons are not receptive to them.

One way to improve this situation is to create a culture in venues in which harmful gambling is not supported. It has been argued that knowing other people in the venue can serve as a protective factor against problem gambling as it does not allow for the anonymity that enables problem gambling to flourish (Thomas et al., 2010). In line with this finding, responses from both staff and gamblers emphasised the value of building relationships between staff and regular patrons. It is clear that a strong existing relationship made it easier for staff to check in with a patron about their

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gambling in a meaningful way that would be less likely to offend or alienate them. The relationship building process is, however, complicated by an expectation that staff will not perform a counselling role and will maintain a professional boundary. The tension between these expectations, therefore, creates a challenge for staff to build relationships with regular patrons to enable them to effectively and sensitively undertake host responsibility tasks, while also allowing some distance so as to not 'overstep the mark'. It is also important to note that encouraging more interaction between staff and gamblers is contrary to the aims of some patrons who engage in gambling to zone out and relax. These findings suggest that the solitary, private nature of EGM gambling enables problem gambling behaviour. However, given that several participants described this as one of the motivations for gambling, there is likely to be resistance to changing this dynamic. It is very important to consider these tensions in the context of expectations placed on staff and training provided to support staff in the completion of these tasks.

Another option is to influence a more positive framing of host responsibility requirements in Class 4 venues and raise awareness among patrons of the purpose and value of interventions by staff. It can be argued that finding a way to normalise these interventions is important. A previous study concluded that patron education on host responsibility relating to problem gambling, as with alcohol, would be beneficial (Hing & Nuske, 2011). Patron education in Class 4 venues about host responsibility could help to normalise staff interventions and result in these approaches being more positively received by gamblers and, thus, more effective. However, interventions to educate patrons will only be successful if patrons are receptive to this. Both staff and gambler respondents indicated that approaches regarding gambling behaviour while in the venue may not be well received. While staff being *available* to provide information about gambling harm is clearly valuable, expecting staff to provide unsolicited feedback on individual gambling behaviour may be of questionable worth. This issue must be considered carefully when planning strategies to normalise host responsibility practices, so not to alienate those who may genuinely need support.

The private, solitary nature of EGM gambling for some patrons presents a unique challenge for staff tasked with host responsibility requirements and is a key issue that requires careful consideration. It was clear that several staff who took part in this research manufactured opportunities to talk to patrons, rather than making a direct approach. Several gambler respondents were particularly resistant to the idea of a staff member providing unsolicited advice or asking questions about their gambling. It is, therefore, important to support staff making these 'accidental' interventions that are less likely to produce a negative response.

Both staff and gambler respondents offered other suggestions to help make gambling environments safer. These suggestions predominantly related to regulatory change and concerned the number of venues and machines, opening hours and more consistent rules across venues. Surprisingly, a few gambler respondents noted that they would be in support of EGMs being removed entirely from venues. It was clear that while there were mixed experiences and perceptions of host responsibility, the majority of respondents were concerned about some aspects of EGM gambling.

## CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this research demonstrate the importance of host responsibility but also highlight the significant challenges for staff attempting to undertake interventions in a meaningful and sensitive manner that reaches gamblers who may need help. These challenges include the following:

- There can be difficulties identifying problem gamblers due to ambiguity of each patron's individual circumstances.
- There is a risk of offending patrons and this having a negative impact on business.
- The private solitary nature of EGM gambling creates awkwardness around approaching patrons.
- There is a tension between building strong, positive relationships with patrons while not breaching professional boundaries.

Supporting staff to overcome these challenges is essential to ensure that approaches made to gamblers are as effective as possible. However, the diversity among patrons means that there is no single 'right' approach and, thus, campaigns and initiatives focused on host responsibility in this context must take this diversity into account.

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# APPENDIX A: GAMBLER INTERVIEW GUIDE

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## Gambler interview guide

### *Gambling history*

The first questions are about when you first started gambling. It would be useful to get a sense of your first experiences gambling.

**1. When did you start gambling?**

(Prompt: How/why did you start? Where did you start?)

**2. And since you started – how much has gambling been a part of your life?**

(Prompt: Query why/why not?)

The next questions are about your current or most recent gambling. This just helps us to understand a bit more about where you are at with it at the moment.

### *Current/recent gambling behaviour*

**3. How do you manage your gambling?**

(Prompt: do you do things like set yourself a time limit, a budget or watch how often you gamble?)

**4. Would you say you managed it effectively?**

(Prompt: does placing limits on your time/budget/how often you gamble always work?)

**5. Do you ever regret the time or the money you've spent when gambling?**

(Prompt: do you feel like you wish you hadn't?)

**6. Can you describe the last time you gambled?**

(Prompt: where did you go, how long were you there for, and how much did you spend?)

**7. Is what you've just described typical?**

**8. When you go to venues to gamble, how much contact do you have with the other patrons?**

(Prompt: do you just say hello, or do you get talking? Do patrons normally talk to each other?)

**9. How much contact do you have with the staff?**

(Prompt: do they greet you when you walk in to the venue? Do they approach you when in the gaming area? Does this happen at each venue?)

**10. How do you decide when you have finished using the machines for the day?**

(Depending on how it is flowing, prompt around whether they ever lose track of time and how they feel at this point)

***Awareness of host responsibility requirements/avenues for support***

**11. If you ever wanted to talk to someone about your gambling, who would you be most likely to talk to? Why this person?**

**12. When at a venue, what would be the best way a staff member could check in with you about your gambling?**

(Prompt: Has this ever happened? Can you tell me what the staff member said? How did you react?)

**13. How would you feel if you witnessed a staff member approaching someone else?**

(Prompt: Has this ever happened? Can you tell me about what you saw and heard? In your opinion, did the staff member do this the right way?)

**14. Have you ever been worried about other people who are gambling alongside you?**

(Prompt: What made you worry? What did you do?)

**15. What do you think venues could do to make their environments better for people coming in to play the pokies?**

(Prompt: could staff interact with people on the pokies more, would set 'rules' be helpful, if there were materials to look at)

# APPENDIX B: STAFF INTERVIEW GUIDE

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## Host Responsibility Interviews

### Staff Interview Guide

- 1. Just to get started it would be helpful to get more of a sense of the type of venue you work at. You don't have to name your workplace, but if you do please remember that it won't be used in the study.**

(Prompts: how big is the venue, how busy is it, how many pokies are there in the venue? Is there a lot of gambling going on? Are there 'regular' gamblers? What sort of people are coming in? How well do they get to know people who come in to use the gaming machines?)

- 2. Is gambling a central part of the venue you work at?**
- 3. How do you feel about the gambling that goes on during your day to day work?**

- 4. Do you gamble?**

- 5. How much contact do you have with people who are in playing the pokies?**

(Prompt: Can you see into the pokie room?)

- 6. How much time do you spend in the pokie area when you are working?**

(Prompt: How often do you check the pokie room (if at all)?)

- 7. Does your venue have a policy about checking on people who are gambling? What does a check involve?**

- 8. How do you know if someone has a problem with gambling?**

(Prompt: What would alert you to this? What are the behaviours that differentiate them from others and make their gambling a 'problem'?)

- 9. Are there any things that you are expected to do if someone is exhibiting these behaviours? What are these things?**

(Prompt: Try to tease out whether they think this is their role, their awareness of the legal requirements, and how they interpret them)

- 10. What other additional things do you do in your workplace if you think someone has a problem with gambling?**

- 11. How would you feel about approaching someone who looked like they might need help with their gambling?**

(Prompt: How would you go about making this decision? What do you think about before you approach someone? What are some of the barriers? What would stop you from

approaching someone? Try to draw out some examples of any times when they have encountered this situation – storytelling)

**12. Have you received any training to help you do these things? What did this involve?**

(Prompt: who provided this training? Is any additional training provided in-house?)

**13. What could change to make it easier for you to speak to someone you thought might need help with their gambling?**

(Prompt: What would enable you to do this better? Provision of materials and resources, key messages to emphasise, ways of approaching, training, regulation with set rules about when to intervene, big billboards or more subtle messaging. Try to tease out what would be helpful on a government and a general workplace level)

**14. Do you have any other comments or suggestions relating these questions or anything that I haven't asked you about?**

## APPENDIX C: RESPONDENT INFORMATION SHEETS

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### Participant Information Sheet

Study title:	Research on gambling in pubs, clubs and hotels		
Researchers	Lynzi Armstrong	Contact details	02102300685
	Sarah Wright		02102884758
	Rowan Peck		02102315277

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#### Project Background

This Health Promotion Agency is undertaking research with people who use gaming machines (pokies) in pubs and clubs. The purpose of this research is to better understand how people are gambling and how gamblers interact with staff when using the machines in these venues. We will also be talking to staff in the various different venues as part of this research. The findings of this research will help to inform the Health Promotion agency work programme about gambling environments in New Zealand.

#### Who can take part in this study?

You are invited to take part if you have used pokie machines in pubs, clubs or hotels. We will also be doing interviews with staff from a number of venues.

#### What am I being asked to do?

If you choose to take part in the study you will sit down for a confidential face to face interview with one of our researchers. The interview will be about your experiences using pokies in pubs and clubs, what sort of contact you have had with staff in these venues, and some of the things you might see and hear while you are using the machines. Although there are some set questions, you should not feel restricted by these. If there is anything that you think is important and hasn't been asked about, you are welcome to tell the interviewer. The interview is likely to last for no longer than 60 minutes.

To ensure that we can accurately report what you tell us, we would like to audio record the interview, with your consent. This is so that your exact words can be written down and used in the research report. This recording will be stored securely in a password protected file and will only be accessed by the researchers working on this project. The recording will be destroyed after the research is completed. Your name or any personal details that could identify you will not be used at any stage in this research.

To confirm that you would like to take part you will need to sign a consent form. This form will be stored in a locked cabinet and will only be accessible to the researchers involved in this project. You will also be given a copy of the consent form and information sheet to keep for your own records.

### **What if I don't want to take part?**

You do not have to take part if you do not want to. If you do not want to take part you do not have to give a reason. Participation in this project is voluntary.

### **What if I change my mind?**

You have the right to change your mind about participating in this study at any time. You do not have to give a reason if you do not want to. If you do change your mind none of the information you have provided will be used in the research.

### **Why would I want to take part?**

In taking part you can make a valuable contribution to knowledge about gambling, which will be used to inform future campaigns on gambling harms.

### **Will it cost me anything to take part?**

There will be no costs associated with taking part in this project other than your time and potentially travel expenses depending on your choice of interview venue. We will not be reimbursing participants for the costs they incur. However in recognition of your participation in the project you will receive a \$50 supermarket voucher as Koha.

### **Can I see a copy of the results once the project is finished?**

All participants have the opportunity to request a summary of the research findings. To do this you will have to provide contact details so that this can be sent to you at the end of the project. Please be aware that the results are unlikely to be available until early to mid 2014.

### **Who do I contact about the project if I want to take part or if I want to ask questions?**

If you have any questions about this project you can contact one of the researchers on the mobile numbers listed above, or alternatively, contact Lynzi Armstrong on 04 894 7247 or [l.armstrong@hpa.org.nz](mailto:l.armstrong@hpa.org.nz).

# Participant Information Sheet

**Study title:** Research on gambling in pubs, clubs and hotels

<b>Researchers:</b>	<b>Lynzi Armstrong</b>	<b>Contact phone</b>	<b>02102300685</b>
	<b>Sarah Wright</b>	<b>numbers:</b>	<b>02102884758</b>
	<b>Rowan Peck</b>		<b>02102315277</b>

## Project Background

This Health Promotion Agency is undertaking research with staff working in pubs and clubs where there are gaming machines to find out more about the gambling environment.

The purpose of this research is to better understand your role as a staff member and to find out more about the behaviours and interactions of people who play gaming machines in the venue where you work. We will also be talking to people who gamble as part of this research.

The findings of this research will help to inform the Health Promotion agency's work programme about gambling environments in New Zealand.

## Why have I been invited to take part?

You have been invited to take part because you work in a venue where gaming machines are located. We are interested in what it is like to work in this type of venue, and to understand how you feel about interacting with patrons who are using the gaming machines.

We will be interviewing a number of staff from different venues across the country to build a picture of the gambling environment and to gather insights about what would help staff and patrons keep gambling fun and safe for all.

## What am I being asked to do?

If you choose to take part in the study you will sit down for a face to face confidential interview with one of our researchers. The interview questions will be about your experiences working in venues where gaming machines are available to use. The interview is likely to last for no longer than 60 minutes.

To ensure that we can accurately report what you tell us, we would like to audio record the interview, with your consent. This is so that your exact words can be written down and used in the research report. This recording will be stored securely in a password protected file and will only be accessed by the researchers working on this project. The recording will be destroyed after the research is completed. Your name, the name of your workplace, any personal details, or details that could identify your workplace will not be used at any stage in this research.

To confirm that you would like to take part you will need to sign a consent form. This form will be stored in a locked cabinet and will only be accessible to the researchers involved in this project. You will also be given a copy of the consent form and information sheet to keep.

### **Why would I want to take part?**

By taking part in this study you are helping us to better understand what it is like to work in a place where people gamble, staff experiences of day-to-day gambling and how they might handle a situation if they think someone is gambling too much. In taking part you can make a valuable contribution to knowledge about gambling, which will be used to inform future projects on gambling harm.

### **Will it cost me anything to take part?**

There will be no costs associated with taking part in this project other than your time and potentially travel expenses depending on your choice of interview venue. We will not be reimbursing participants for the costs they incur. However in recognition of your participation in the project you will receive a \$50 supermarket voucher as Koha.

### **What if I don't want to take part?**

You do not have to take part if you do not want to. If you do not want to take part you do not have to give a reason. Participation in this project is voluntary.

### **What if I change my mind?**

You have the right to change your mind about participating in this study at any time. You do not have to give a reason if you do not want to. If you do change your mind none of the information you have provided will be used in the research.

### **Can I see a copy of the results once the project is finished?**

All participants have the opportunity to request a summary of the research findings. To do this you will have to provide contact details so that this can be sent to you at the end of the project. Please be aware that the results are unlikely to be available until early to mid 2014.

### **Who do I contact if I have questions?**

If you have any questions about this project you can contact one of the researchers on the mobile numbers listed above, or alternatively, contact Lynzi Armstrong on 04 894 7247 or [l.armstrong@hpa.org.nz](mailto:l.armstrong@hpa.org.nz).

## APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORMS

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### Participant Consent Form

- I have been given an information sheet to read and the researcher has explained to me the purpose of this research.
- I know I don't have to take part in this research if I don't want to.
- I know I can choose which questions I want to answer and I can leave the discussion at any time.
- I understand that all information I provide will be kept confidential. What I say may be included in research reports but not my name or any other details that could identify me.
- I have contact details for the researchers and I know I can contact them if I have any questions about the research.
- I have received a \$50 gift voucher in recognition of my participation in this project.

Signed..... Date.....

# APPENDIX E: SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

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## Pokies research project: Socio-demographic questionnaire

Date.....

Time.....

Location (e.g. cafe, HPA etc)

.....

Is the interview location outside of the participant's workplace?

Y/N/NA

### What gender do you identify with?

Female	
Male	
Prefer not to answer	

### Within what age range are you now?

Under 18 years	1
18-21 years	2
22-29 years	3
30-45 years	4
Over 45 years	5
Prefer not to answer	6

### How would you describe your ethnicity?

NZ European	1
Māori	2

Samoan	3
Cook Island Māori	4
Tongan	5
Niuean	6
Chinese	7
Indian	8
Other	9

**What education have you had?**

Primary School	1
Secondary school (1-2 years)	2
Secondary school (3 years or more)	3
University, Waananga or other tertiary	4
Don't know	5
Prefer not to answer	6

How long in total have you been working in your current role?

.....

How long in total have you worked in environments where people are gambling?

.....

What is your current job title?

.....

