

Help-seeking and support services: views of people with gambling problems and their concerned significant others

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Outline



Introduction: gambling harm and help-seeking in Finland



The present study



Materials and methods



Preliminary results



Discussion and next steps

Introduction

Gambling in Finland

- Highly prevalent
- 3 % of the population experiences gambling problems directly
- 21 % experience harm due to the gambling of others (Salonen et al., 2020)

Treatment

- Conducted by municipal, state-level and third-sector actors

Salonen, A., Lind, K., Hagfors, H., Castrén, S., & Kontto, J. (2020). Rahapelaaminen, peliongelmat ja rahapelaamiseen liittyvät asenteet ja mielipiteet vuosina 2007–2019. Suomalaisten rahapelaaminen 2019 [Gambling, problem gambling and attitudes and opinions towards gambling in 2007–2019. Finnish Gambling 2019]. Raportti 8/ 2020. Terveystieteiden tutkimuskeskus ja hyvinvoinnin laitos

Background: PhD Project

Schedule: 2/2023 ->

Funding: Finnish Foundation for Alcohol Studies (80%)

Part-time work: A-Clinic Foundation (20%)

Article 1: Gambling harm in families. Qualitative content analysis on peer support message board discussions

Article 2: Experiences of support services by concerned significant others of people with gambling problems. Barriers and facilitators to help-seeking. A mixed methods approach

Article 3: Social and health care professionals' perceptions on gambling harm prevention and support services

Background: Development project *Yhteispelillä!* (2020-2023)

Regional models for preventing and treating gambling problems

- Focus on two regions with high gambling participation

In collaboration with municipalities, NGOs and Finnish Institute for Welfare and Health

- education for social and health care professionals
- development of service paths and low threshold services

Funded by Funding Centre for Social Welfare and Health Care Organisations

Coordinated by Henna Vuorento, Camilla Metsäranta & Johanna Vakkuri

- Gambling survey

A-klinikkasäätiö



The present study

Experiences of support services by concerned significant others of people with gambling problems. Barriers and facilitators to help-seeking. A mixed methods approach

Objectives: This study looks into the process of help-seeking from gamblers and CSOs point of view

- Different forms of gambling-related harm
- Knowledge of available support services
- Encounters with professionals
- Views of the current service system

Materials:

Gambling survey (conducted in development project *Yhteispelillä*)

Peer support discussions (Addiction Link)

Data collection and measures

Gambling survey

Carried out in two regions in the autumn of 2022

- 1 221 respondents

Measures

- Gambling habits
- Experiences of gambling harm
- Screening of gambling habits in healthcare and social services
- Experiences of help-seeking
- Views of available support services

Gender	n	%
Woman	654	53.6
Man	560	45.9
Other / Prefers not to disclose	7	0.6
Age		
18 - 25	150	12.3
26 - 35	242	19.8
36 - 45	275	22.5
46 - 55	286	23.4
56 - 64	268	21.9
Occupation		
Employed	641	52.5
Unemployed	115	9.4
Student	105	8.6
Retired	115	9.4
Other	59	4.8
Region		
Urban	621	50.9
Rural	600	49.1

Peer support message board

Two peer support discussion boards for individuals who are worried about

- their own gambling
- their loved ones' gambling

Administrated by an NGO specialized in harm reduction and support for people grappling with addictions

Data collection

- After obtaining research permission
- Discussion threads related to different forms of gambling harm, help-seeking and support services

- Total of 54 threads containing 660 messages

- Qualitative content analysis
 - Experiences of gambling harm
 - Experiences of help-seeking
 - Views of available support services

Preliminary results

Peer support discussions

Experiences of gambling harm

Survey:

Experiences of harm reported by

- 27 % of respondents who gamble
- 47 % of respondents close to someone who gambles

Relationship harm, emotional harm, financial harm

Relationship harm	Abuse
	Trust issues
	Family problems
Emotional harm	Guilt and shame
	Isolation
	Disruptions in life-course expectations
Financial harm	Motivation to work
	Ability to work
	Dependency on welfare

Relationship harm

Family dynamics: CSO point of view

Division of labor at home: The non-gambling partner in charge of household responsibilities and finances

- a maze of financial troubles
- many felt alone and unsupported with an unfair share of responsibility
- feelings of burnout and exhaustion

Power shifts in relationships

- Regression from an equal partner to a dependant

And just like that, family finances became my responsibility. Both of our salaries go straight to my account and I handle all the expenses. If he needs anything, I'll give him some cash and ask for receipts in return - it's like a business transaction. He keeps saying it's easy for me because I get to control everything, but that's not even close. To be honest, I'm exhausted beyond words.

Emotional harm

Life-course expectations

Many participants held (at some point) traditional values and life goals:

- Getting engaged and married
- Buying a house
- Having children

As gambling-related issues caused problems to financial stability, emotional well-being and relationships, the pursuit of these milestones was disrupted

- isolation, loneliness, feeling like a failure, disconnection from social circle

My partner's struggle with gambling addiction has affected our plans to start a family which has caused me great sadness for many years. Although things are looking up, we still have major financial struggles that prevent us from pursuing parenthood at the moment. It's tough seeing my friends happily raising little ones while I struggle with unfulfilled dreams of parenthood.

Help-seeking

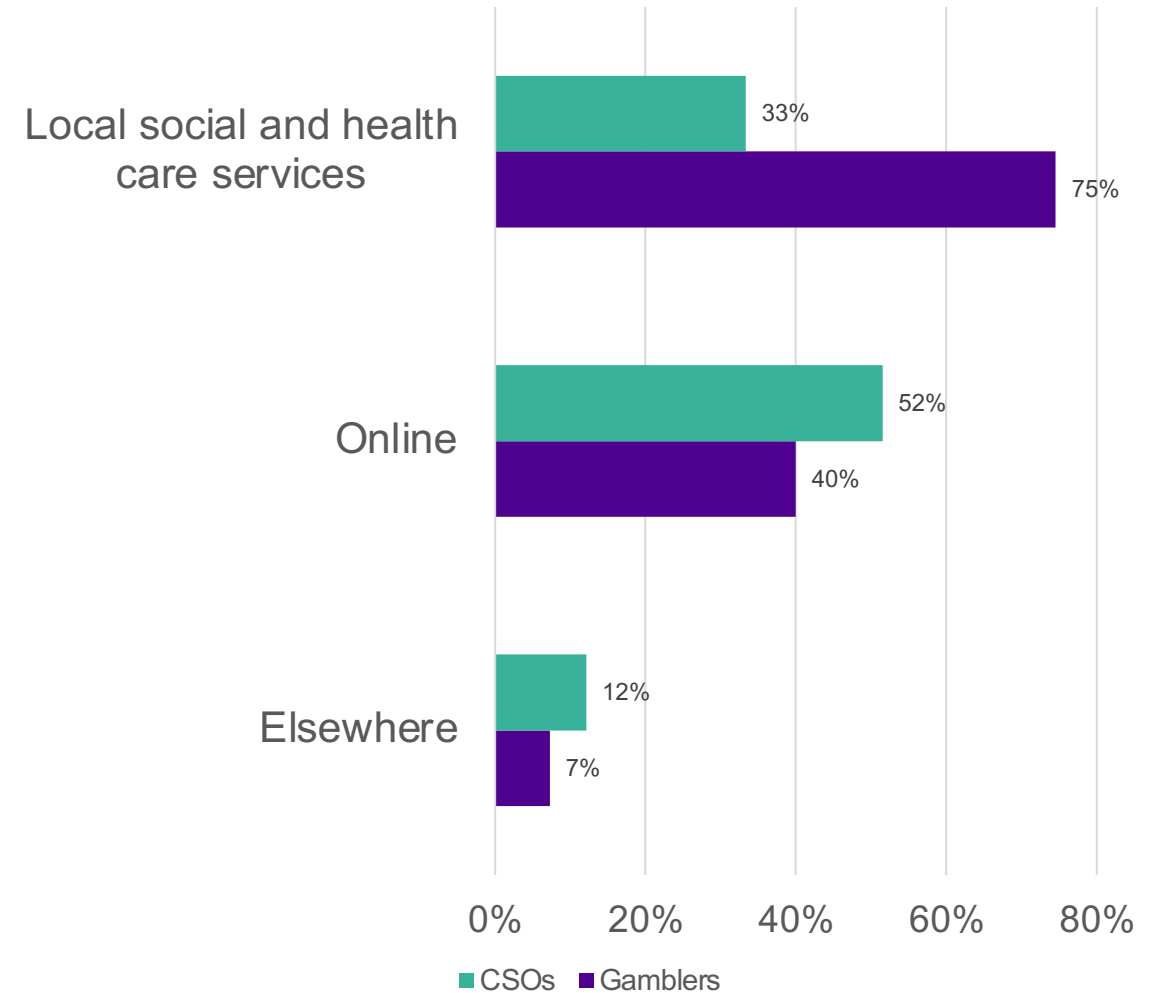
Survey

- Majority of the respondents who had experienced gambling harm did not seek help
- I don't know where to seek help from
 - Respondents with gambling problems 11 %
 - CSOs 24 %

Peer support discussions

- Practical guidance on how and where to seek help was a frequent topic of the discussions
- Especially financial counselling

If you did seek help, where? (n=72)



Financial harm

We just can't make ends meet. I'm juggling work and studying while picking up as many extra hours as possible, but how long can I keep this up? It's demotivating when no matter how much we do, we always end up broke.

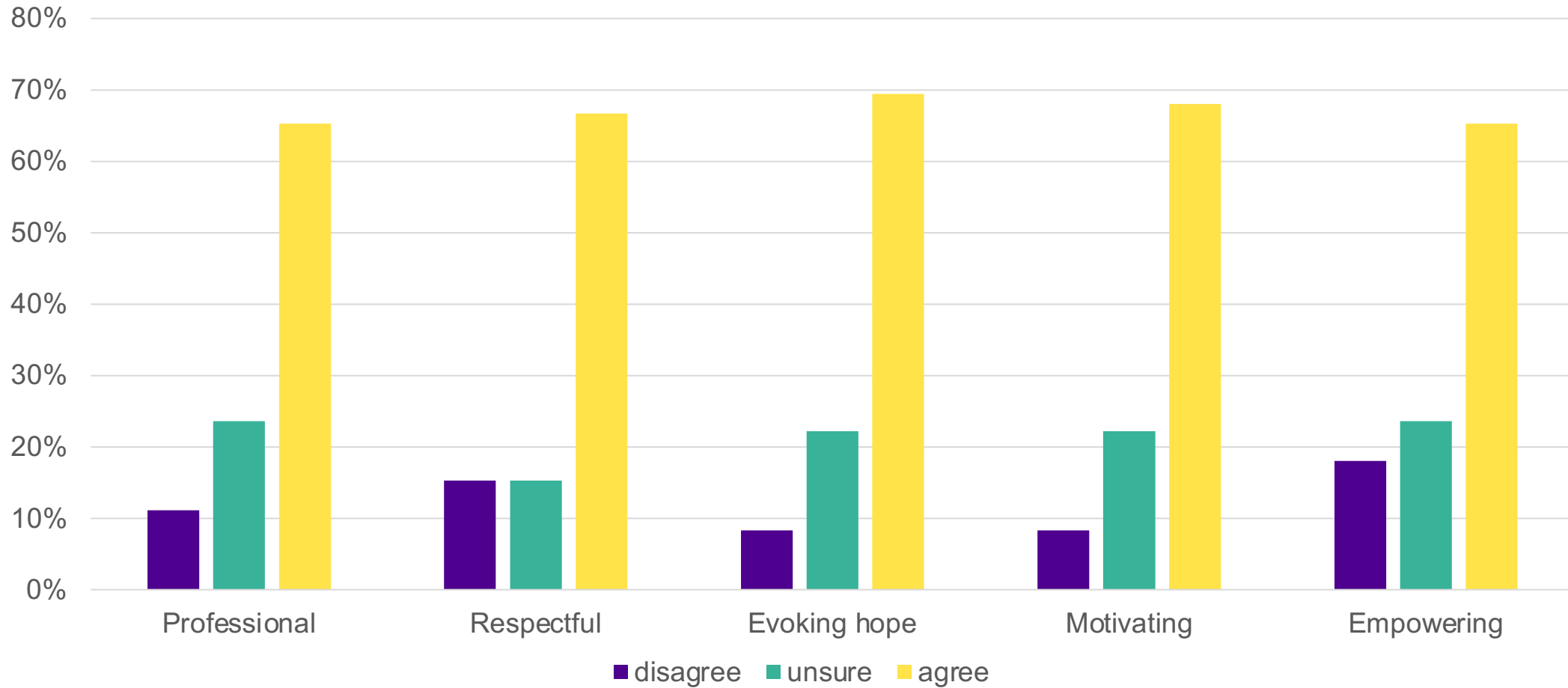
Attempts to mitigate the situation

- Partners often tried to improve the situation by picking up extra work
- Financial struggles rooted in gambling were often so severe that extra work didn't really help
- Motivation starts to erode

Effects on partners' professional lives

- Health harm
 - loss of sleep, problems with eating, stress, depression, anxiety, exhaustion
- Reduced performance, absenteeism
- Ability to work compromised

How did you experience encounters with support services staff? (n=72)



Experiences of help-seeking

Peer support discussions

Lack of knowledge among social and health care professionals was witnessed by many

Invalidating experiences made it all the more difficult to reach out, becoming a barrier to help-seeking

On the other hand: more positive experiences during 2020s

When seeking help, I felt that the health care staff was genuinely interested in the topic but lacked sensitivity. They expressed shock over the debt and kept asking how on Earth I let the situation get so severe. Thinking back, those comments were not very appropriate coming from professionals.

Views of available forms of support

Survey

Do you think the available support services meet the needs of persons with gambling problems and their concerned significant others?

- Respondents with gambling problems: 15 %
- Concerned significant others: 13 %

What type of assistance do you desire that is currently lacking in availability?

- Peer support
- Outpatient care
- Councelling

Discussion

Next steps:

- Finalize the analysis
- Based on the development project *Yhteispelillä* (2020-2023), we are writing recommendations for development of regional prevention and treatment services

Health care reform: a threat or a possibility?

- Effects on social and health care services organized by the public sector
- NGO funding

Thank you!



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