



Cultural Factors

WHAT IS THIS FACTOR ABOUT?

This factor describes how culture is related to gambling. Culture is a shared group of thoughts or values and is represented by symbols, rituals, norms, attitudes, and beliefs. Cultures vary across the globe and can have an impact on people’s views about gambling, gambling frequency, type of gambling activity, and gambling severity.

WHY IS THIS FACTOR IMPORTANT?

Culture can affect how much people gamble, the popularity of different gambling types, attitudes toward gambling, how people gamble, and the extent of harmful gambling. It may also have an impact on the consequences of gambling problems and treatment results. The current literature on this topic is limited, so the research presented here will provide a knowledge base that researchers can build upon.

WHAT TOPICS ARE INCLUDED IN THIS FACTOR?

Ethnicity and Traditions

Every ethnicity has its own traditions and outlooks. Some cultures view gambling as a shameful activity. In cultures such as these, many people fail to seek treatment for their gambling problems. In cultures where access to commercial gambling is just beginning, there is often only a small number of people who will gamble. This group is likely to gamble more heavily and develop gambling problems.

For other groups, such as new immigrants, gambling venues may offer a welcoming place to meet new people and escape the stress associated with moving to a new country (e.g. homesickness, potential lack of employment, etc.). The research suggests that there are high rates of problem gambling among immigrant populations. The high rates could be due to things like

a stronger belief in luck, or the attraction to the prospect of becoming rich.

Factors associated with a reduction in gambling harm are having little money, and playing less at commercial gambling venues.

Indigenous Peoples

Indigenous People are the people who first occupied a given land or territory. This definition has not been universally adopted though, because Indigenous People themselves may not identify with, or be aware of the term. There are historical descriptions and evidence of the use of words in their language to indicate that Indigenous People have gambled for many years. Within Indigenous cultures, they view gambling as a ritual, or a social, recreational, and/or spiritual activity. Some studies show that gambling also creates revenue for Indigenous communities. This revenue can help to fund schools, create jobs, and improve social services.

The current evidence suggests that there are high gambling participation rates and related levels of harm in some populations of Indigenous People. Reasons for high rates of harm are an increase in the availability of gambling venues, a lack of previous exposure to gambling, and having certain cultural beliefs. Some studies show differences in Indigenous groups’ preferences for gambling activities. For example, one study found that Māori populations in New Zealand favour bingo and card games more than non-Indigenous people.

Socio-Cultural Attitudes

A person’s cultural beliefs and his or her society’s beliefs influence socio-cultural attitudes. In terms of gambling, attitudes can shift over time. For example, as consumerism becomes more prevalent, society’s view of gambling becomes more positive. When a society views gambling positively, it becomes normalized and, therefore, easier for people to regularly gamble. Another reason why gambling



attitudes shift over time could be due to a cyclical process of excessive gambling followed by social disapproval.

Other sociocultural factors that influence gambling include social class, political orientation, and demographics. Social class broadly refers to a person's social and economic status. It is also influenced by family background, level of education, and career choice. Research suggests that certain social classes favour specific gambling activities. For example, Western societies view bingo as an activity for women with a low income, whereas in Europe, they view roulette as an activity for the upper class. Political orientation refers to a person's moral values about gambling. These values tend to differ based on political orientation. For example, people with conservative political views usually disapprove of gambling when compared to those with a liberal view, which tends to be more accepting. Age can also make a difference. Age cohorts are groups of people who were born during the same time period. Each age cohort tends to share similar values. For example, older adults may approve less of gambling than Millennials because they grew up during a time when gambling was illegal.

Religion and Other Belief Systems

Opinions about gambling vary across religions, although there is a general pattern. Religious groups that believe in more than one God (e.g., Buddhism, Hinduism) tend to have more positive views about gambling when compared to groups that only believe in only one God (e.g., Mormon, Jehovah's Witness). Additionally, people who gamble and who belong to a faith that does not approve of gambling are less likely to gamble intensely.

Despite a decline in the number of people formally practicing religion, many people still seek a spiritual experience. Some people turn to gambling to fill this spiritual void. People can also use spirituality to overcome gambling problems. For example, Gamblers Anonymous, along with other twelve-step treatment programs, are based on spirituality and faith. One part of religious belief is magical thinking. Magical thinking involves irrational thoughts that result in behaviour change. An example of a magical thought would be going to a casino because you believe it is your lucky day. This kind of thinking can contribute to gambling harm.

Gambling Cultures

Gambling cultures are subcultures that can develop at any gambling venue. The venue is usually a casino or racetrack where players can spend hours at a time. Players get to know the staff, build relationships, and develop new ways of interacting. These relationships are inviting and socially rewarding for people who have relationship issues outside of gambling, even if this may be due to gambling too much.

Gender

Gender refers to the interpretation of a person's biological sex. Many factors influence gender including ethnicity, culture, and class. There are also gender differences when it comes to gambling participation, motivation, and problem gambling. For example, many cultures view gambling as a more acceptable activity for men than for women. Men are more likely to gamble, spend more money gambling, and have more gambling problems versus women. Women more often gamble as a way of coping with stress and as a form of escape from daily life. Studies show that women are more likely to have gambling problems if they are married and employed. Women are also more likely to gamble on games of chance, and if the gambling venue seems clean, safe, and attractive. The development of gambling problems, however, is similar for men and women if they are participating in the same gambling activity. More studies could be done to explore the extent to which gender influences gambling behaviour.

This is a summary of the cultural factor, one of eight interrelated factors that comprise the Conceptual Framework of Harmful Gambling. To learn more about this factor, please refer to the [full report](#) or visit the [cultural factor webpage](#) on the GREO website.