Exploring the nature of gambling issues for young people living in rural communities

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Executive summary

Overview

Australia has experienced a dramatic liberalisation of gambling legalisation since the 1990s. As a result, there has been an expansion of gambling venues and an increase in access to gambling products. The 1990s saw the introduction of electronic gaming machines (EGMs) in Victoria, the opening of the Melbourne casino, and two decades later the proliferation of sports betting companies (Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation [VRGF], 2013). Further to this has been the rise of new technologies including internet gambling, which provides greater/immediate access to gambling products, and has no space or time limitations. Total recorded expenditure in Australia reached 19 billion dollars in 2008-2009 (Australian Government Productivity Commission [AGPC]), which both created revenue for governments and stimulated economic development in the leisure and entertainment sector.

Whilst gambling is a relatively harmless recreational activity for many, the Productivity Commission estimated that in 2009, around 115 000 adults experienced severe problems with gambling, and a further 280 000 people who experienced a moderate level of problems (AGPC, 2010). Current adult prevalence rates are estimated at 0.7 percent and 1.7 percent of the adult of population for problem and moderate-risk gambling, respectively (AGPC, 2010). Whilst this might appear small, the Productivity Commission stated that around 0.2 percent of the population are estimated to have used heroin in the preceding year, and that small prevalence rates do not necessarily mean small problems for society (AGPC, 2010). In fact, the annual cost of gambling problems to the community is estimated to be around 4.7 billion dollars. Gambling-related harms include relationship breakdown, depression, suicide, reduced work productivity, job loss, bankruptcy, fraud and other crimes, and homelessness (AGPC, 2010).

What is perhaps alarming is that the prevalence of gambling problems among adolescent populations is estimated at between 4 and 8 percent, two to four times the adult population rates (Purdie et al, 2011). So the previous research establishes a firm rationale for further exploration of youth gambling given the high prevalence rates of gambling problems among youth, and the negative consequences that gambling problems can produce. We can also speculate that new gambling technologies make gambling more accessible and attractive to young people and hence likely to either inflate or see the problem continue (Ariyabuddhiphongs, 2013), making this an important area for future research. While there is a growing body of research in relation to youth gambling, much of the research is prevalence-focused, quantitative, school-based and descriptive (Ariyabuddhiphongs, 2013). From this research, we know that gambling among youth can be associated with a number of factors, such as poorer coping skills, family history, impulsivity, excitement seeking, cognitive bias, perceived incentives and mental health issues (Ariyabuddhiphongs, 2013, p 98), and that a greater proportion of youth problem gamblers also report involvement in other risky behaviours (Purdie et al, 2011; Delfabbro and Thrupp, 2003).

We don't, however, have a good understanding of the lived experience of young people with a gambling problem. What is needed is smaller scale investigations based on interviews with youth, people who commenced gambling in their youth and affected others concerned about youth to complement the various correlation studies, and to ascertain the context in which gambling behaviours develop, and to ascertain insight into the behaviours including motivations for gambling and for help seeking (Delfabbro and Thrupp, 2003).

Whilst we know that certain personality traits and coping strategies are associated with youth gambling, we don't know whether the behaviour or traits or coping styles are innate or learned.

This report was able to answer some of these questions by exploring with participants how their social environment and social interaction shaped their gambling experience. This study clearly indicated that gambling can and often is intergenerational especially in relation to Indigenous populations but not exclusively and that some of the cognitions around developing gambling problems were taught at an early age. It is also found for those young people who continued to gamble, whilst peers ceased, described their relationship formed with gambling was complex and sometimes related to past trauma. This study was able to understand the pathways around how and why individuals start to gamble in their youth and continue with their behaviour, or in fact cease their behaviour and understanding young people's interactions with various factors such as social, technological and environmental networks.

Purpose and Aims of the Study

The purpose of the study was to explore participants' perspectives and interpretation of youth gambling within a small rural community and a larger rural community, and to ascertain the level of complexity and a more contextualised view of youth gambling.

The study had four aims.

1. To understand the motivations that lead to decisions to gamble, to seek help and not seek help.

2. To understand the origins or formation that lead to youth gambling.

3. To understand the context in which youth gambling occurs.

4. To understand the perspective of youth gambling from affected others and youth not affected by gambling.

Methods

The study design

The design followed a critical realist approach to qualitative research using thematic analysis to make sense of the data collected. The critical realist approach accepts that people construct their own reality but that this reality can be shaped by wider social influences. There exists therefore a reality separate from the consciousness of people. Nevertheless people's interpretation of their experiences and their perceptions of everyday life creates a version of reality that is directive of the way people respond to situations and events. It is also acknowledged that the interpretation and analysis of the data is influenced by the researcher's own understanding and experience of the world and that in no way does the researcher claim to have reached the 'transcendental truth' of the phenomenon under study (Ezzy, 2002, 25). The study has a small sample size and of course many actors who would have valid perceptions and experiences in relation to gambling are not represented in this study.

Participants for this study were recruited using purposive sampling, meaning that participants were chosen based on the studies purpose. Despite the rigorous recruitment process very few people responded, especially young people with gambling problems, and it was decided to include some participants who were now adults but identified as having a gambling problem in their adolescence. There are clear limitations to the final sample in this study which will be discussed in the methods section. The study received ethical approval from the Anglicare Human Research Ethics Committee and followed full ethical protocols.

Data were collected using semi-structured in-depth face-to-face interviews. Using the same technique some interviews were conducted in a group format, as the young people who wanted to participate felt more comfortable participating as a group. Data was analysed using a thematic analysis technique which comprised open coding, axial coding and selective coding.

Key Findings

One key theme and three subthemes emerged from the findings.

Normalisation

One key theme emerging from the findings was linked to the notion of normalisation. It was a very important concept raised by participants that described the origins and formation that lead to youth gambling, the context in which youth gambling occurs, the motivations and explanation for the progression of youth gambling. This theme was particularly expressed by those participants describing the Indigenous experience. The process of normalisation in this study describes the cultural accommodation of gambling, the social acceptability within particular networks of young people, and the availability and accessibility to gambling products (Wilson et al, 2010, 165).

Normalisation of gambling has largely been described as a production of socialisation relating mainly to the influence of family, and less emphasis on peer socialisation. Whilst not all families of young gamblers were gamblers themselves – primarily in the Indigenous sample, parental gambling was definitely perceived as the primary socialisation agency.

Interaction between normalisation and trauma based experience

Nevertheless whilst normalisation is a prescriptive and useful explanatory process, it also needs to be viewed in the light of other psycho-social issues experienced by youth who gamble. The context giving rise to gambling was more complex and linked to experiences of trauma and intergenerational trauma. It was seen possibly as not just a recreational and social experience but more likely a learnt coping strategy to deal with past trauma. Certainly some participants talked about the dissociative effect of gambling and the experience of changing moods to positive emotions experienced whilst gambling.

The role of structure and agency and normalisation

The other challenge to normalisation, although normalisation still plays a role, is the explanation which can be conceptualised in the debate about structure and agency. The explanations of some participants and an understanding of not only inequalities experienced by Indigenous populations and low socio-economic populations but also the disadvantages experienced living in small rural communities raised the debate about how poverty and lack of meaningful experiences linked to a lack of opportunity and employment leads to pastimes like gambling. Whilst some participants suggested it was individual choice, as they had chosen a different path but come from similar backgrounds, it was evident that there needed to be a balance of explanation notably found in debates between structure versus agency.

The hidden nature of gambling

The hidden nature of gambling was a key concept raised by youth gambling researchers. In particular Derenvensky et al; (2014) described youth gambling as the 'hidden addiction'. There are a number of factors relevant to this concept raised in this study including a link again to normalisation, that is some youth see it as normal behaviour, however youth also do not recognise their gambling as a problem primarily because they don't experience necessarily the adult consequences of gambling and because it is not always viewed by professionals dealing with youth as a primary concern in the complex presentations of youth in their services.

The notion of the hidden nature of gambling could also be seen as relevant to the rise of digital technologies and young people's aggressive up take of these technologies. It creates a context in which youth can gamble online and in private. Nevertheless whilst this is a legitimate concern it may not be so much the technology to fear but again, returning to the theme of normalisation, it may be social expectations and the normalisation of consumptive behaviours influenced by belief (perhaps taught by parents and the media, and gambling games on-line) that gambling is a way to achieve success. It is a much wider issue and must be examined from a broader perspective other than blaming technology as it was shown in this study that much of the medium for gambling still tended to be cards, pokies and sports betting situated in clubs and pubs.

Background

The social acceptability of gambling and the `hidden addiction' for youth

Based on international and Australian research it is evident that the majority of adolescents have gambled at some point, both in informal settings and formal settings (Purdie etal, 2011). This may be associated with the liberalisation of gambling in Australia since the 1990s, and the general social acceptance of gambling as a legitimate recreational and leisure activity. Delfabbro and Thrupp (2003) suggest gambling may be seen as a rite of passage for young people, a symbol of adulthood, maturity and independence. Hence, there is an initial increase in youth gambling participation rates as young people transition from adolescence to early adulthood (Delfabbro, King and Griffiths, 2014). Fabiansson (2006, pp 345-358) found that young people had an extensive knowledge of gambling and often were involved in recreational and social gambling within the family context. Splevins et al, (2010) found that youth in their study reported that parents and siblings were the primary providers of lottery tickets sending, a message of 'cultural acceptability' of this form of gambling, and Fabiansson (2006) suggested that the financial transactions involved in gambling were often orchestrated by parents and older siblings on behalf of the underage youth.

Interestingly parents and teachers view adolescent gambling as relatively unimportant compared to other potentially risky behaviour (Campbell et al, 2011; Derevensky et al, 2014). An unpublished study undertaken in Central Victoria also found that youth service providers were less concerned with youth gambling compared to other problems faced by young people (Shannon and Savage, 2013). It wasn't that they viewed gambling as harmless they just didn't perceive it to be a youth problem. Similarly, Campbell et al, (2011) found that parents also viewed the prospect of youth gambling as being problematic, and that they would seek help if they suspected their child was gambling but it wasn't an issue they were concerned about relative to other risk taking behaviour. However, a study by Rossen et al, (2016) found that gambling is a popular pastime for children and young people, and in fact it is one of the first risky behaviours adolescents engage in. This engagement is with a range of activities from informal modes such as betting amongst friends through to more formal activities such as EGMs (Rossen et al, 2016). Rossen et al, (2016) stated that research has shown that access to the more formal types of gambling are accessible to young people despite aged-related restrictions.

Other research has suggested that youth themselves viewed gambling as a social activity used to relieve boredom and establish roles in their social networks (Skinner, Biscope, Murray and Korn, 2004). The images youth identified with gambling were generally positive and only addiction was viewed negatively (Skinner et al, 2004).

However addiction was viewed as an adult issue because of its connection with money-based gambling and major losses (Skinner etal, 2004). It is not surprising then that Derevensky et al, (2014) describes youth gambling as the `hidden addiction'. Despite the high prevalence rate of youth gambling problems relative to the adult population, youth problematic gambling is largely going undetected and young people themselves are not seeking help. It is likely that part of the reason is that youth gambling problems do not manifest in the same way as adult gambling problems and therefore are less visible. For example youth do not lose their homes, jobs or spouses (Derevensky et al, 2014), and may not seek help until they see severe consequences (Splevins et al, 2010). However youth may disconnect from family and

friends, and may not meet other milestones that their peers meet like establishing lasting relationships and saving money to set themselves up with housing etc. Splevins et al, (2010) also suggests and it seems likely that teachers or parents or others involved with youth are looking for adult signs of problem gambling and miss youth indicators, or indeed confuse youth indicators such as delinquent behaviours, petty theft and loss of social relationships as the sign of other risk taking behaviour. However recent research on unhealthy gambling amongst secondary school students found that gambling coexisted with the engagement in other addictive behaviours, alcohol being the strongest predictor (Rossen et al, 2016). It was also found that while many youth gamble, it is only a subset of youth that go onto experience serious problems, and it seems the earlier age at which young people start gambling predicts a more serious problem (Rossen et al, 2016). It is therefore paramount that future research investigates whether there are qualitative differences between youth and adult gambling in order to inform policy, and early intervention and prevention strategies, and to accurately raise awareness of how youth gambling problems can coexist with other problematic behaviour amongst the public and youth services.

Online gambling and the risks for young people

The full effect of online gambling on young people has not yet been revealed but there is much speculation that young people will be susceptible to this type of gambling because of their technological sophistication. The Australian Government Productivity Commission (2010) writes that as a result of technology and the emergence of online gambling, new problems will present themselves. Online gambling is available 24 hours a day, it is accessible to any geographical location provided there is internet reception, and encourages the use of credit – there is no capacity for venue staff to observe and assist people when they are in trouble and it reaches out to people who may be vulnerable to that medium in particularly the young (AGPC, 2010). Online gambling creates the perfect conditions for, or opportunity for, impulsive gambling, which is associated with pathological gambling.

Not only is there the link between technological know-how of young people and the ease with which they can adapt to online gambling, there is also the fear that children and adolescents are being exposed to more and more gambling-like games. Ladouceur, Blaszczynski and Pelletier (2004) suggest that children and adolescents are drawn to games of chance and skill and are particularly attracted to computer based arcades and hand held games, and therefore may be also vulnerable to electronic gaming devices like video-draw poker. Further to this, children and adolescents can access non-monetary forms of gambling, which often promote unrealistic notions of being able to win, and can confuse the notion of skill and luck because the gambling aspects of the game are presented in a largely skill based video game (King et al, 2010). The inflated pay rates and the notion that gambling is about skill could create `cognitive distortions' for young people, giving them a much more positive view of gambling as a way of making money (King et al, 2010). As already stated the implications for gambling and young people and the convergence of gambling and digital media are not yet known (King et al, 2010) but will no doubt be the subject of important future research. Interestingly, 103 young people participating in research in Canada commonly used gaming websites (card and casino type games) and video games but at the same time had awareness that winning was made easy and that this was skewing perceptions about odds (Skinner et al, 2004).

Some were also aware that these online games might be training for real gambling and if you got good at them you might want to play for money (Skinner et al, 2004).

This shows two things, one: that young people can ascertain the risks or roles of gaming websites, so it must be real, and two: young people can be discerning about the influences, and therefore would probably be receptive to preventative information. It would be advantageous to explore further with young people with gambling problems their perceptions and experiences in relation to video games and subsequent gambling behaviour, and their preferred mediums for gambling.

The profile of the youth problem gamblers

It was found that youth problem gamblers tended to have a more positive and optimistic view towards gambling as a means of making money, and also rated themselves as skilful at their favourite gambling activity (Splevins et al, 2010). Whilst it is not certain what creates these attitudes, it is probable that socialisation via the family, peers and the media may play a role, as family history of gambling, knowledge of peer gambling and advertising are all associated with youth gambling problems. It is also notable that non-monetary games targeted at young people could also mislead young people about their chances of winning and the role of skill in gambling, which makes research that investigates with youth how they came to gamble and the role of various socialisation processes very important in an overall understanding of the phenomenon.

To date there is research which will be discussed that investigates `individual and psycho-social deficits' that might account for gambling behaviour but there is limited understanding of how the social context of early gambling, that is the interactions between youth and the social world, might also account for why individuals start and continue to gamble (Reith and Dobbie, 2011). Nower, Derevensky and Gupta (2004), for example, describe the relationship between impulsivity, sensation seeking and coping strategies, suggesting that people who act on impulse (inability to delay gratification and act without forethought), and people that seek sensory stimulation are predisposed to developing gambling related problems. These are considered to be personality traits, and are mediated by people's coping style –so with a combination of impulsivity and sensation seeking, and poor coping strategies (avoidant style coping strategies) a person might choose to gamble because ultimately gambling is an intensely stimulating activity that generates excitement and facilitates mental escape (Nower, Derevensky and Gupta, 2004). Nower, Derevensky and Gupta (2004) found that both impulsivity and intensity seeking are highly predictive of problem gambling behaviour in male and female youth, and while in males problem gamblers were more likely to avoid stressors by engaging in fantasy and denial, among females coping strategies had little predictive value. Again, the question asked by Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu is whether dispositions and coping styles are inherent or are in fact the products of learning generated through social relations (Reith and Dobbie, 2011). This qualitative research answers this to an extent by exploring with participants how their social environment and social interaction shaped their gambling experience.

An Australian study also found that youth problem gamblers also report involvement in other risky activities such as graffiti or tagging, smoking cigarettes, trespassing on private property, using illegal drugs, fighting and theft, and generally differed from non-problem gamblers by having a lower self-esteem, displaying delinquent behaviour as suggested, and having a positive attitude towards gambling (Purdie et al, 2011). Youth problem gamblers also tend to have poorer educational outcomes, greater

levels of anxiety and depression compared to their non-gambling peers (Delfabbro and Thrupp, 2003). What is not known is whether these characteristics shown to be correlated with youth problem gambling are present before the gambling, and hence risk factors or predictive factors or whether they are adopted simultaneously or after the development of gambling behaviour. What we do know is that for a significant proportion of youth (about 5%) problem gambling at the very least is a sign of broader difficulties in adolescent well-being and development (Delfabbro, King and Griffiths, 2014). These young people are preoccupied with gambling, chasing losses, overlooking commitments, lying to peers and family, borrowing money or stealing, and continuing to gamble despite the negative outcomes (Delfabbro, King and Griffiths, 2014) – all signs of serious addiction requiring intervention.

Help seeking and the rural environment

As already suggested youth generally are not seeking help with their gambling addiction; and this may partly be due to the fact that related harms are not perceived to be as serious as those harms associated with adult problem gambling. Adults tend to seek help because of financial and relationship breakdown (Nuske and Hing, 2013); young people don't tend to be married or responsible for other people so these may not be motivating factors for them. Barriers for seeking help for adults were shame, embarrassment, and the belief that they could regain control on their own or win back the losses (Nuske and Hing, 2013). We know very little about the role of shame and stigma for young people and gambling but we do know the fear of stigma associated with mental health issues can cause people to disconnect rather than reach out for help. We also know that it is possible gambling is overlooked as a critical issue when dealing with the complex needs and issues of young people because of the association of problematic gambling with adults, and perhaps young people don't reveal the issue in order to preserve at least some positive narrative about themselves as Holdsworth and Tiyce (2012) found in their study about gambling among people who are homeless.

The rural environment presents even further obstacles to seeking help in regard to both availability of services and the rural culture. There has been some misconception that smaller and socially closer populations are also more homogenous. If this were so then the delivery of services would also be less complicated because people would have similar needs. This, however, is not the case. Rural populations are characterised by diverse socio-economic and demographic background (Hugo, 2000). A diverse population also means a plurality of needs. However it is difficult to cater for all these needs given that many communities do not have a large enough population size to support a range of services and opportunities. It has also been found that people living in more isolated communities tend to fare worse on major economic indicators such as unemployment, annual family income, one parent families and Aboriginality (Humphreys, Mathews-Cowey and Rolley, 1996). These populations are disadvantaged further by the fact that they have to travel for most and sometimes all support services. Therefore young people from rural communities may find it difficult to access appropriate services to help them with their issues, without incurring significant barriers such as cost and transport. Further to this is the issue in relation to stigma. The physical characteristics of rural communities and rural culture imply a different experience of the same phenomenon such as stigma compared to their urban counterparts.

Small populations, a lack of formal services, leading to reliance on self and community and hence a closeness of communities, impacts on issues of anonymity and confidentiality (Boyd et al, 2006). Therefore it is a significant possibility that the experience of stigma will be magnified by the nature of the rural environment, and hence impacting on people's help seeking behaviour.

It is quite possible that gambling problems will be viewed similarly to other mental health problems such as a failure to self-regulate and a moral failing, and again such feelings can be more intensely felt in rural communities because of a lack of confidentiality and community closeness. Small communities can often have distinct social norms about the expected way to behave, and these norms can be perpetuated by measures of social control (Dempsey, 1990, Boyd et al, 2006); often resulting in the marginalisation of people that don't fit these social norms. Further to this, cultural characteristics attributed to rural people such as self-reliance, inner resourcefulness and stoicism (Wainer and Chesters, 2000,143; Boyd etal; 2006) may mean that rural youth believe they can self-manage or are bailed out by their family, as these characteristics pertain to family structure as well as the individual rather than seeking professional help.

Vulnerability towards gambling of youth in rural areas

It is not known, but it could be speculated that rural youth are particularly vulnerable to gambling, again as a function of place and social expectations. Rural communities are no longer isolated from gambling venues, as a result of access to the internet and the location of EGMs in local pubs and clubs. So a combination of a lack of access to a range of educational experiences and leisure activities and the availability of gambling methods may make rural youth more vulnerable to taking up the pursuit in order to relieve boredom. Rural areas are also characterised by high unemployment and low income security and yet the message to young people is that success is measured by material possessions – factors that could combine with an unrealistic positive attitude toward gambling and drive to succeed that leads to gambling behaviour. There is to some extent structural inconsistency produced by the rural environment, where society defines certain goals, purposes and interests as legitimate and desirable but in rural areas there is not always adequate resources and opportunities for achieving the objectives through legitimate means (Mirowsky and Ross, 1989).

Approach

Aims and objectives

The aim of the study was to explore participant's understanding and interpretation of youth problem gambling in a way that captures its inherent nature, and to understand how the rural environment can shape the experience. This study was also concerned with why youth gambling occurs and the influences that drive youth gambling.

- To understand the motivations that lead to decisions to gamble, to seek help and not to seek help:

- To understand the origins or formation of experiences that lead to youth gambling, and to seeking and not seeking help:

- To understand the context in which youth gambling occurs:

- To understand the perspective of youth gambling from affected others and youth not affected by gambling

Research Design

The research is an exploratory study designed to raise themes and issues that will inform future research. The majority of research conducted in this field has been quantitative and the aim of this study is to explore perceptions and experiences that can be difficult to measure quantitatively such as the meaning people give to their experiences. The intention of the research was to conduct interviews with youth who identified as having a gambling issue, people who saw themselves as affected others and youth who did not identify with having a gambling problem. Whilst this process was not abandoned completely there were issues in relation to recruitment that meant some interviews were conducted in groups, as some of the young participants felt more comfortable talking as a group.

Recruitment and Data Collection

Two rural communities were chosen as the place of recruitment. The larger rural centre was chosen because of the much greater access to Gamblers Help services, compared to the small rural centre that does not have onsite Gamblers Help services and often people need to travel for this support. The rationale was to represent rural communities, and acknowledge that the issues for rural communities can be different depending on size and location of the community. The two communities were also chosen as they fall under the Loddon-Mallee Gamblers Help catchment and hence the information is advantageous at a practice level.

Participants were recruited through advertisements in print media, online media, and advertisements in higher education institutions and social meeting places. Gambler's Help counsellors were approached to ask if they could forward information about the study to potential participants engaged in the services. Different youth services were also approached to distribute information about the research. Snowball sampling was employed whereby initial participants were asked to distribute information about the study to people they know in similar situations.

Despite the rigorous recruitment process it was difficult to find participants, especially in the larger rural community. The lack of success in recruitment of young people with gambling problems and affected others confirmed the literature about youth gambling, and its hidden nature, particularly in the larger rural communities. It also revealed that young people don't want to participate in research perhaps because they feel ashamed about having a gambling addiction, as quite a few young people using the Gamblers Help service declined to participate when asked by their Gamblers Help counsellor. The smaller rural community in the study was much more responsive, although very few young people with gambling problems participated in the study, despite respected people in the community trying to encourage these young people to participate. Most of the interviews in the smaller rural community were with affected others – many of these people were elders in the community and young people talking about other young people.

However, we did have people from the larger rural community who wanted to participate as they had started gambling in their adolescence. They expressed a desire to participate in the research as they felt it was a way they could contribute back and were hopeful their stories would help other young people. At this point the researcher abandoned the original direction of the research in regard to age limitations and followed the needs identified by these participants. Whilst there are limitations to retrospective samples which are discussed in the limitations section, it was thought that interviewing people who were older would at least illustrate the progression of gambling and give some understanding about what precipitates people's eventual help seeking. Given that qualitative research is not as constrained as quantitative research in terms of research rules, and does not claim to provide generalizable results or strict cause and effect relationships there is scope to be more creative (Glicken, 2002, 151), and it was a decision made based on the fact that it would produce some valuable insights, also based on the rationale the participants gave for wanting to participate and the time constraints in the recruitment phase.

Data was primarily collected using semi-structured in-depth face-to-face interviews. Given that this research was concerned with the lived experience of young people with gambling problems and their affected others within the context of the rural environment, the most effective way to understand people's experiences and what they mean to them is through in-depth conversation. In-depth face-to-face semi-structured or unstructured interview techniques give great scope for providing explanation and illustration as to whether and why something is important (Minichiello et al,; 1999; Dunn, 2000). In-depth interviewing is a way of collecting data on phenomenon, like meaning given to experience, that is not directly observable (Minichiello et al, 1990). The topic area being studied was complex and sensitive, and required a methodological approach that can take these issues into consideration. For most respondents it was the first time they had spoken about the issues.

Using face-to-face interviews the researcher was able to build rapport and trust not always achievable with the use of survey forms. Participant interviews were also recorded with the permission of the participants. Using the same technique, some interviews were conducted in a group format, as the young people who wanted to participate felt more comfortable participating together. In total there were two group interviews, one group interview included 4 young people from the small rural community, and the other included 5 young people from the large rural community. The group of 4 were young people who identified as non-gamblers but had friends that gambled and the 5 young people from the other group identified themselves as problem gamblers.

The study proposed to interview 28 participants, however after extensive recruitment in both rural settings and the extended recruitment time the total number of participants was 24. The majority of participants were Indigenous (17). Most participants were from a small rural centre (15) (population size between 500- 3000), while 9 participants were from a large rural centre (population size greater than 50,000). It was much easier to recruit in the small rural community, as the people in the small rural community identified gambling as a problem in their community and wanted to participate in the study. In the larger rural centre adolescent gambling was either not perceived as a problem, or because of the bigger population is much more hidden. In the small rural community participants talked about seeing adolescents and the families of adolescents gambling regularly. Note that the study was concerned about people's experiences and perceptions of place and access to services rather than describing objective measures of rural and remote and accessibility classifications.

The small rural community in the study is quite demographically diverse but people who self-selected to participate were primarily from the Indigenous community and this wasn't expected hence the literature review completed before the study did not specifically focus on Indigenous issues, however the results and conclusion section does address many Indigenous issues found in the literature and relevant to this study.

Table 1: Summary of demographic information of participants

		Young participants	Older participants
Gender	Male	6	6
	Female	6	6
Age Group	16-24	9	-
	25-29	3	-
	30-49	-	5
	50-59	-	6
	60-69	-	1
	70+		
Gambling status	Affected other	-	7
	Young non-problem gambler	9	-
	Problem gambler	3	5
Location	Small rural community	9	6
	Large rural community	3	6
Indigenous status	Indigenous	9	8
	Not Indigenous	3	4
Employment status	Full-time	4	4
	Part-time	-	2
	Casual	3	-
	Self-employed	-	-
	Pension	-	3
	Unemployed	1	3
	Retired	-	-
	Student	4	-

Recording, transcribing, coding, interpretation and analysis

Each interview was tape recorded with the permission of the informant and later transcribed. Notes were made during the interview discretely so as not to appear preoccupied and more extensive field notes were written immediately after the interview.

Thematic analysis

The main method of analysis used was thematic analysis. Typical of qualitative research, analysis of the data was interrelated with data collection. Interviews were transcribed and coded during the data collection stage, and notes or memos were made throughout data collection in a process of preliminary analysis (Ezzy, 2002). The initial coding of transcripts was reflective of open coding. Each paragraph of the interview was given a code name to represent the phenomenon being described. When all the interviews were complete each transcript was re-read to determine the linkages between codes, and to grapple with the core themes. The second level of coding is called axial or theoretical coding, and this is a process of making connections between the categories identified in the open coding. This part of coding is when the researcher begins to make comparisons and contrasts, and searching for possible explanations hence the term theoretical coding. The final stage of coding is the point at which a core category or central theme of the data emerges, and is called selective coding. The figure below illustrates the final conceptualisation of the data. The overarching theme or core category was around the normalisation of gambling, which then interacts with and influences, and is challenged by other categories such as trauma experiences. Normalisation of gambling also contributed to an understanding of pathways to gambling and progression of gambling. However as illustrated by the figure normalisation is not the sole explanation as pathways to gambling are also influenced by factors related to trauma and structure and agency.
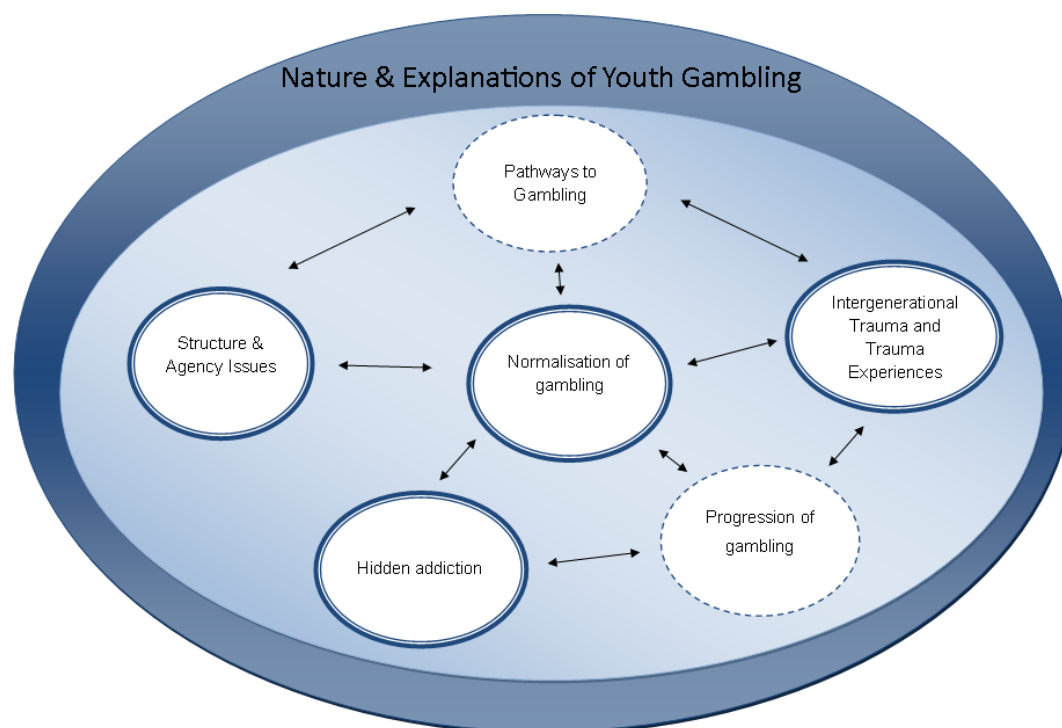

Figure 1: Pictorial depiction of the final conceptualisation of the data

Limitations of the research design

Despite utilising various methods of recruitment, it was challenging to find participants. This was particularly difficult in the large rural community but also across communities there were difficulties attracting actual young people with gambling problems. The young people who did participate from the larger rural community, who identified as having gambling problems, also chose to present as a group. At the time they were in a drug and rehabilitation program but also identified with having gambling problems. Whilst the same questions were asked of the group, it was difficult to get an in-depth understanding of each person's lived experience. This was the same for the group of young people in the small rural community who didn't identify as gamblers but knew young people who were. There were some valuable insights shared, but the data was not as in-depth as it was for the one-on-one interviews. Unfortunately, there is a marked absence of in-depth one-on-one data with the very people we are trying to understand in relation to gambling. However, given the time limitations of the study, the data collected, whilst mainly representing the perspective of affected others in the small rural community it is still useful data in terms practice, for example as a result of the information in relation to the small rural community, Anglicare's Gamblers Help program is now going to provide an outreach service to this small community, including education for young people in schools and other activities made up of young people. We were also able to ascertain that young Indigenous people would be more responsive to hearing the lived experience from people that have previously experienced a gambling addiction as youth and their recovery story.

The rationale for the decision to include participants who were now adults but started gambling in their youth has been explained earlier in this section. Clearly there are challenges in relation to retrospective data. There can be problems with what people recall from their past, or simply that on reflection people may make sense of their past differently than they would have when they were the young person. It is therefore data that doesn't necessarily represent what young people today would describe or explain in terms of their lived experience in relation to gambling. Further to this, whilst some of these participants had experience with online gambling or opinions in regard to online gambling, it was not as relevant to them when they were younger as it is with today's young people. Similarly the context in terms of what help was available to these participants when they were younger was probably also quite different. It would be in a sense comparing apples with oranges given the changes to the gambling environment over the last 10 years. Nevertheless, the motivations for gambling, and the reasons for gambling may be similar, for example, gambling on whatever medium might be a coping mechanism for dealing with a traumatic childhood. There are some constants across time, like the existence of poverty, or the experience of traumatic events.

The study also makes no claims of being representative of a broader population or of necessarily representing the Indigenous experience. It has sought to understand the perspective of youth gambling from participants who self-selected for the study, and had experience in relation to youth gambling. The data therefore raises issues and context that requires further investigation whether conducted in a qualitative or quantitative framework.

The researcher is also aware that the chosen methodology, and the interpretation and analysis of these findings have been impacted upon by the researcher's primary theoretical position. From a critical realist perspective the researcher supports the position that people construct their own reality, and to investigate this reality it is important to understand the meaning people make of their lives or to understand the lived experience, however it is also held that these constructions are also shaped by the broader social context of people's lives. There are therefore outside forces that shape peoples lived experience, and research can show that impact of these outside forces can have both commonalities in experience for people, and a level of uniqueness at that same time. Hence, the researcher has interpreted and discussed the findings within various sociological constructs like structure and agency, and been cognisant, given the Indigenous sample, of the way colonisation and social policy have created the situation of intergenerational trauma. The researcher has also explored sociological theory like normalisation and socialisation to make sense of the data and to develop key themes and explanations. Nevertheless, the data, that is the words of the participants, directed the researcher to explore these particular sociological constructs.

Confidentiality

In order to ensure confidentiality of the participants, place names are not used, nor are exact population sizes. The different place contexts are delineated by small rural community and larger rural community. Names used in the findings have been changed. It was intended not to be specific about various characteristics of participants in the results section such as exact age, occupation or cultural identification or a breakdown of female and male so as to ensure confidentiality. Given that most people came from the small rural community it was particularly important not to reveal specific details of participants.

Results

Normalisation of gambling

Role of family and community

Gambling was described by participants as common among young indigenous people living in the small rural community. What seemed to be the major theme was that many young people saw gambling as 'normal' and an 'accepted' part of leisure time. It was described by participants as 'intergenerational', 'learnt behaviour', and a 'cycle going around and around'. Gambling has clearly become more normalised at the macro level with the continued liberalisation of gambling legislation and the proliferation of gambling venues (VRGF, 2013, 290). However, for the young Indigenous in the small rural community, participants described the family or parents as being responsible for the involvement of young people in gambling. Further to this, it would also seem to extend to a 'cultural accommodation' (Measham and Shire, 2009, 503) of gambling evident in the opportunities for young people to gather together in community.

> Sally (affected community member and worker): "It comes from their parents it is just a cycle going around and around and I don't think that until you change their parents – to get across to them it is not the right thing – I think it is a really hard thing to stop."

> Margaret (young person who identified as a non-gambler): "It's intergenerational – thinking that it is okay as they have seen it growing up in the family home."

> Debra (affected other – elder in the community): "I see a lot of young people and elders sitting around in the community playing cards. And it is not just for fun but for money. For big money – 5 dollars on one go. There's a big pot full of money."

Socialisation

Participants described children mimicking parents and older siblings in gambling games which reflects Mead's theory of socialisation that children learn about roles of significant others through pretending to be other people in play (Robertson, 1987, 123-124). Socialisation is also the process whereby individuals learn patterns of thought, social skills, values and behaviours to conform to norms and roles of a culture or society (Robertson, 1987, 115).

> Paula (affected community member who was also affected by gambling in her adolescence and continued into adulthood): "Children watch – and when they are old enough to understand they participate. Children copy parents – even little children mimic adults and pretend to play."

> Sally (affected community member and worker): "It goes back to how they were brought up. They were brought up playing cards or go down to the TAB or sit in a club. The kids are running around the pub. Most of our kids that gamble I can probably tell you who the next generation of gamblers will be. They always say mum had a big win and went to place name and bought us clothes but before that for 3 months they might not have had a pair of shoes and they are wearing thongs to school."

It seems therefore that young children are learning about the role of gambling and possibly viewing gambling as something that can give pleasure, coupled with the availability and acceptability within the family structure.

Peer pressure

The literature certainly indicates that many young people experiment with gambling but only a smaller proportion go on to develop problems (Delfabroro, Winfield and Anderson, 2009). It is also recognised that risk taking behaviour in adolescents in the majority of cases is transient (Ladouceur, Blaszczynski and Pelletier, 2004). So whilst there may be an element of peer pressure, it was interesting to note that young people in this study recognised that gambling was an issue for young people but still perceived the early socialisation and acceptance of parental gambling as the prime reason why young people gamble. Nevertheless, as the quote above indicates some people who commenced gambling in their adolescence in this study reported that it was not something accepted within the family. It was also reported that for some young people that gambling did begin with going to venues with peers in their free time at school.

One participant said his gambling was a part of an adolescent rebellion but he felt he was the influence not his peers. I asked him a question: How did you learn about gambling? Did you have parents that gambled or was it peers? He responded:

> Rodney (participant who started gambling in their adolescence): "No it was more me. Because I grew up religiously – you know no gambling and no sex before marriage and all that – you know none of the good stuff…. Definitely a rebellion thing for me, being brought up in the religious side of things. I just wanted to escape from it. I pretty much did everything I could um I broke nearly every rule that I could."

Interestingly the notion of 'peer pressure' as the primary articulation of youth culture (Pilkington, 2007, 213) has only explained a part of why youth gamble from the perspective of participants. It would seem that whilst some young people gamble with their peers, it has been a response to other socialization processes and perhaps trauma discussed later in the results. Young people's gambling may be perceived then as informed by other processes rather than an uninformed response to peer pressure (Pilkington, 2007, 213).

The progression of adolescent gambling

Again participants described the progression of young children toward gambling into their adolescence as a product of normalisation and socialisation. Participants described early exposure to card games and bingo transmitting the notion that gambling is an acceptable leisure activity. There was also a perception that early gambling experiences leads to adult gambling. This was particularly the case for young indigenous children. So the progression was from early observation of parental activity, to participating in easier to understand forms of gambling to the more harmful means of gambling like EGMs and to perhaps gambling that is perceived to require knowledge and skills like horse racing.

> Sally (affected community member): "You know for the young people to go and play cards – it's just normal and I guess fun and something to do. It then progresses to the pokies. I know kids that left school and gone straight into the pokies and I know their mother had them at cards from a young age."

> Carol (young person who likes to gamble but doesn't identify as having a problem): "Early gambling experiences leads to adult gambling. Young ones before they turn eighteen play cards then they move into the horses and pokies."

Indigenous experiences

Participants described gambling to be insidious within the Indigenous community and within the small rural community. Other studies have indicated that gambling is a 'prominent activity' within Indigenous communities with a focus on 'socialisation', 'leisure' and a way to 'reduce boredom' and 'escape daily pressures' (Hing et al, 2014, 7). Hing et al; (2014, 8) found in the literature research an indication that gambling is very 'common' and 'widely accepted'. Gambling was certainly described in this study by affected others and non-gambling youth as a way, encouraged by adults (mainly family) as an acceptable form of recreation in the early formative years of the developing child.

Not everyone in the community gambles problematically but it is still a consistent source of problems. This situation was also described by participants in this study. It was described by participants as being particularly a problem for young people in relation to gambling because it seemed to be their one and only social experience.

> Sally (affected community member): "I am always ringing up families – where is such and such. Oh he had a late night and then the kid finally gets to school and I say where have you been and he says were up playing cards until 3 in morning."

> Shane (young person who identified as a non-gambler): "That's all they do. They don't want to go school – they don't want to work. Wagging just to go to a card game."

> Sharon (young person who identified as a non-gambler): "It is pretty sad though. You see a handful of kids sitting in the parks when they should be at school – they are in full uniform gambling cards wagging school. All sitting around the table at the park gambling. It is a lack of motivation for other things and leads to other behaviours like drugs and alcohol and crime. They can't entertain themselves any other way."

Debra (community elder identified as affected other): "Kids wag school and go to people's places and gamble all day. I use to work in Juvenile Justice and you go to find them and they'd be all playing games. That's when kids steal money and steal things to sell so they can gamble."

Interaction between Normalisation and Trauma

The exposure to the wins and the positive benefits of winning may also help to shape a particular cognition within children or young people that gambling is a rational choice. Nevertheless the normalisation theory may also be critiqued as an oversimplification (Mesham and Shire, 2009, 503). Some participants described it as a much more complicated and dynamic process, in that it was linked to feelings of connectedness occurring after traumatic events.

Daniel (participant who started gambling in his adolescence): "I was about 15-16 when I first started gambling because I was living with Pop at that stage. Mum had passed away. So I had to go live with Pop and Pop was a chronic gambler and drinker but a very hard working man and I just learnt from him…for me it was sort of like a bonding session between me and Pop."

Other participants also discussed the role of complex events in young people's lives precipitating gambling behaviour.

Rodney (participant who started gambling in their adolescence): "Even though you might be hurting like hell – and there could be some seriously bad stuff going on. You just stay quiet. Sometimes it builds up and it builds up and that's why you know – that's why I went to alcohol, I went to drugs, I went to gambling."

Intergenerational trauma and Indigenous youth

In relation to Indigenous youth living in the small rural community it was suggested that underneath a lot of adolescent behaviour, especially drugs and alcohol and gambling, is the experience of childhood traumatic events – these things are suggested to cause young people to do things they wouldn't normally do just to survive. They also learn these coping strategies from parents and family, who have also had a history of trauma. Hence the normalisation of gambling is possibly a way of analysing and explaining the involvement of young people in gambling. However, some groups of young people, especially the young people that get 'stuck' while other youth move away from gambling may require a deeper understanding of the psycho-social backgrounds of those youth, and an understanding of how gambling starts out as fun but develops into a coping strategy and a way of escaping from difficult emotions.

John (participant who started gambling in adolescence): "A lot of complications came like, you know, um – a lot of things happened in my youth – threw things out of whack a bit. I was involved in a lot of it but also a lot of other stuff. Like family members dying a lot younger – lost an uncle to suicide – lost some of my other family to a car accident. I lost my Nan to leukaemia. Gambling was a way of escaping."

Peter (participant who started gambling in adolescence): "It started out as fun and then I used to get a euphoric feeling when I would win. It used to be good. Yeah beauty no dramas – and then deep depression that came with the losses."

The role of structure and agency

Escape from poverty

A lot of gambling research in mainstream literature displaces much of the focus on structural conditions onto the individual (Schissel, 2001, 474), including notions of individual pathology as opposed to investigating how the larger, structural issues can explain (Schissel, 2001, 474) gambling behaviour. Motivations for gambling could be a potential escape from poverty (Schissel, 2001, 475) and this was discussed by some participants. It was interesting to also view this in the light of people living in a small rural community given that these communities are often disadvantaged in terms of the lack of opportunities to engage in activities like meaningful employment.

> Paul (affected community member who was also affected by gambling in his adolescence): "There needs to be more jobs and careers. When they are just doing nothing they get into trouble. Maybe if the money they got was a bit more because they probably think if they gamble they can double their money. That's probably what gets them into the habit. Just think it is a way to make money."

> Carol (young person that likes to gamble but does not identify as having a problem):" I think place name does have something to do with it. There is just nothing here for them. There use be a youth drop in centre but that's gone. That was really good."

Individual choice

Other participants tended to explain the situation as one of individuals making poor choices rather than an outcome of small rural environment or social inequalities. Again, describing families (parents) needing to change so that children don't get involved in gambling.

> Shane (young person who identified as a non-gambler): "There was nothing to do when I was growing up but I didn't turn out that way. You go and do something to keep you occupied. Make your own fun."

> Sharon (young person who identified as a non-gambler): "Yeah no it has got to start from home – they can't just keep saying there is nothing to do. It's like well have a look at others and what they have done. Shane and I were both brought up by our Grandmothers and we had our arses kicked if we didn't get up and to school. We got grounded and our phones taken off us. We were told to get up out of bed you are going to school. So we were brought up, not strict but not allowed to do what we want. I think that is why we went down a different path. It is pretty much up to parents to decide how they want to raise their kids."

Need for a balance between structural explanations and individual choice

It seems from the responses that any explanation needs to balance the structural inequalities young people experience with the life choices they face and make (Measham and Shire, 2009, 505). What is required is a perspective that recognises the role of agency but locates them within the broader structure. The literature review alluded to the fact that small rural communities are characterised by high unemployment and low income security which may create a greater vulnerability toward alternative ways of achieving success (Russel et al, 2013). I refer back to the idea of structural inconsistency, where society defines certain goals, purposes and interests as legitimate and desirable but within different groups in society coupled with living in small rural communities there is not always adequate resources and opportunities for achieving the objectives through legitimate means (Mirowsky and Ross, 1989). The history and social position of Indigenous people in Australian can also not be ignored. It is widely accepted that Indigenous Australia's fair worse in terms of socio-economic marginality and disempowerment. It might be hypothesised that those who gamble the most do so because they lack a 'sense of personal control' in their lives (Schissel, 2001, 476). It would follow then that behaviour needs to be understood in a context in which, for most youth, and their families meaningful opportunities are scarce and money is hard to obtain. However, it was argued by some participants that they made different choices despite growing up in the same environment and similar backgrounds.

Hidden nature of gambling

Recognising gambling as a problem

Recognising gambling as a problem was something discussed mainly by the participants who identified as gambling in their adolescence and earlier. At the time of the interviews the participants were aged 25-44. There are obvious limitations to data that relies on people's recall of events from an earlier stage in their life. It is possible that events of the past and especially subjective experiences like thoughts and feelings may have been forgotten or reinterpreted (Patford, Tranent and Gardner, 2015, 228). Nevertheless there were many interesting perspectives from these participants some of which were also reflected by other participants views, and some of which are discussed in the broader gambling literature.

Many of the participants from the Indigenous sample reiterated that although some of the behaviour associated with gambling was illegal that young people did not see it as a 'problem' or have any understanding of the consequences of habitually gambling. What was revealed by participants in the study who were reflecting on their gambling in their youth is that they too did not think gambling was a problem for them. They recognised it as a problem when they began to personally experience the real consequences of their gambling. By this time they described their peers as moving away from the gambling whilst they remained 'stuck' and failing to reach different milestones in their life that their peers were achieving like establishing long lasting relationships, saving money, buying homes. This theme was also supported in the broader youth gambling literature (Derevensky et al, 2014).

> Jim (participant who started gambling in their adolescents): "I started to recognise I had a real problem when I saw all me mates moving on – buying things – getting girlfriends – moving into their own houses and all that – and I am like sitting – I mean I am still sitting here with bloody nothing. I found I had lost everything."

Other participants were somewhat successful in establishing relationships and setting up homes but the persistent gambling resulted in the eventual loss of those relationships.

> Daniel (participant who started gambling in their adolescence): "So it started from about 15 through me late 20s I realised there is something wrong here. I am getting paid from work and I am not even going home after work. I am going straight up to the pub and I am coming home with half me pay. Caused a rift with my partner. I was with her for 14 years – had a child. Lost all that because I was gambling all the time."

> Peter (participant who started gambling in adolescence): "Gambling can cost you everything you've worked for... As much as you have got in your pocket you can blow it no boundaries on money… and everything seems to be okay until bills weren't getting paid – the mortgage and stuff like that – then I was having trouble with my wife. We had a marriage breakdown. Yeah it takes you to lose things – yeah to hit rock bottom to make a change."

> Brett (participant who started gambling in adolescence): Gambling doesn't just ruin you financially it ruins your whole life. It breaks up your family – you lose your job – you lose your motivation – you lose friends. That is the scary part – a lot of people lose their life. Because they think I can't take this anymore and they kill themselves because it is too much. There are so many cases of it. I've read of heaps and I am sure there are many more I haven't heard about."

The recalled experiences of these participants also support the literature that adolescents do not seek help because they don't believe their gambling is an issue. This situation in part could be explained by the fact that they don't have the same responsibilities as adults and do not experience the degree of loss (Splevins et al, 2010).

Gambling not recognised by Service Providers

One of the difficulties in recruiting young people for this study was based on the perception of service providers approached to help with recruiting that gambling is relatively unimportant compared to other potentially risky behaviour, and is not present in their client group. This view is recognised in the literature (Campbell et al, 2011; Derevensky, St-Pierre, Temcheff and Gupta, 2014). The perception was that their client group was mainly from low socio-economic situations and did not have the disposable income to spend on gambling. However research has revealed that one of the biggest risk factors is living in highly deprived neighbourhoods (Rossen et al, 2016). This situation reveals the hidden nature of youth gambling despite its significant prevalence and the association of gambling among low socio-economic groups. Participants who gambled in their youth revealed that there were means and ways to access money, and affected others from the small rural community spoke about young people stealing to access money to gamble with. The question of why youth don't reveal gambling as a part of complex presentation could be because it is not explored by service providers and that youth themselves don't see it as an issue. On the other hand it might be an attempt of the young person to at least 'preserve' some 'positive narrative' of themselves (Holdsworth and Tiyce, 2012) given the stigma and shame of gambling and the general lack of understanding that gambling is an addiction and not something that can be necessarily stopped without the right support and understanding.

> Rodney (participant who started gambling in adolescence): "No adolescents don't seek help for gambling. They just want to hide – well you want to hide or just want escape."

Stigma was also revealed by participants as a possible reason for not seeking help, although not an issue widely discussed.

> Shelly (young person who identified as a non-gambler): "Young people don't want to admit it. Like if they are going through a hard time and they are gambling they don't want admit they are struggling."

> Lachlan (young person who identified as a non-gambler): "It's like admitting – well I think it is like admitting you are addicted to drugs or you are an alcoholic. Like you don't want to wake up to reality and call yourself that. It's hard no matter what sort of addiction you've got. Also, I don't think some people actually realise how much they are addicted."

> Emily (young person who identified as a non-gambler): "They don't seek help because they are probably a bit worried about speaking up or saying anything. A bit scared of what people's reactions will be or even if there is any help."

Online technology and normalisation

It might be considered that the hidden nature of gambling will heighten for young people with the use of online technologies, as young people are described as susceptible because of their technological sophistication (VRGF, 2013). Technology could be considered to play a significant role in the 'normalisation' process of gambling as children and adolescents are being exposed to more and more gambling like games. In the past different modes of gambling may have become 'normalised' for different groups of people depending on opportunity and constraints placed upon them by availability and accessibility. Technology whilst limited to the access of WIFI has no real boundaries and can be undertaken in privacy as opposed to having to physically go to a public space in which to gamble.

Participants were definitely concerned about the impact of technology.

> Sally (affected community member and worker): "Kids at school are just addicted to computers. They cannot cope unless they have a computer in front of them. They won't even go outside to play at recess and lunch time unless I physically walk in shut all the computers down and say go outside and get some fresh air. I wouldn't be surprised if they weren't playing gambling games. They don't do it money wise – but that can lead to real gambling. I can see massive destruction in the next few years. Then there is Facebook. The other day there was a story on there about a man who spent 5 dollars on a scratchy and won and was able to feed his starving daughter and I thought well what if he had lost – how would he fed his starving daughter then. But people see that and think I'll go out and buy a scratchy. Win some money."

> Julie (affected community member): "I see kids on their phones. You can play poker on the phone. You can win money and things like that. You always see them on their phones so they are playing something."

> Marcia (young person who identified as having a gambling problem in their adolescence): "There are apps now you can download that are not age approved. So little kids now are just playing it. Like hearts of Vegas. Yeah, you have got a whole heap of them. Then young people see gambling all over the television – it is everywhere.

However, it is possible that there is a degree of moral panic about the impact of technology on youth (Markey and Ferguson, 2017, 195). There needs to be more research investigating content available to young people online and the choices they make when using the technology. It is the perception of participants in this study that children and young people are exposed to gambling games online. Nevertheless, in the literature a researcher found that young people could discern that simulated and gambling games were problematic (Skinner et al, 2004). Perhaps then it is more about the broader awareness around the consequences of any form of gambling.

Conclusions

Normalisation process and explaining pathways of youth gambling

It was certainly described by some participants, especially from the small rural community that gambling for some youth had become a 'taken for granted' or natural leisure pursuit in everyday life (Sandberg, 2012, 373). The social processes described in which gambling had come to be seen as normal for young people had largely been described as emanating from familial processes, and a cultural acceptance or at least a 'cultural accommodation' of gambling (Wilson et al, 2010, 165). To a certain extent the consumption of gambling has become 'normal' in society as the availability and accessibility of gambling products have increased. It could be argued that the gambling environment in Australia has allowed youth to consume gambling products more freely. Participants described the ability of young people to experiment with gambling as a reflection on wide availability and access to gambling products (Wilson et al, 2010, 165) through people they know, in this case family. On the other hand youth in this study who identified as non-gamblers or at least non-problematic gamblers viewed gambling as wrong and bad especially if it interfered with education, led to criminal activity and was the only social experience of the young person.

A study investigating Indigenous women in New Zealand supports the notion of 'normalisation' and 'intergenerational transference of gambling' (Morrison and Wilson, 2015, 443). Morrison and Wilson (2015, 443) conclude citing a number of studies with Indigenous people that 'early exposure, its acceptability by parents and the wider family, coupled with the hope of winning to relieve living circumstances, all contribute to its (gambling) normalisation'. Other studies such as Breen, Hing and Gordon (2013) found there were positive and negative effects of gambling – a positive being the opportunity for people to gather together and share stories, however, the negative consequences of coming together to gamble also leads to increasing 'community deprivation' and 'diminishing respect for cultural obligations.' Similarly Morrison and Wilson's (2015, 443) study of Indigenous women in NZ reported that gambling for women started out as fun, socially acceptable and a way to feel connected, with the opportunity to win money to ease poverty. However over time, gambling exacerbated their poverty, increasing feelings of shame and low self-worth (Morrison and Wilson, 2015, 444). The issue of poverty and its relationship to gambling is also discussed later in the results.

The use of normalisation as a concept to explain pathways to gambling for youth is not intended to overgeneralise young people, as it was clear from the findings that some youth have much more conservative norms and values about gambling. Hence it cannot be claimed through these findings that gambling has become an increasingly normalized part of youth culture despite the high rates of youth gambling compared to adults. While affected others and youth not gambling described the processes that have produced a situation where young people embrace gambling as an integral aspect of their leisure and cultural landscape (Shildrick, 2002, 39), it is difficult to conclude whether young people who were gambling in the small rural community themselves actually perceived their gambling in this way.

Given that it was difficult to recruit these young people it might be hypothesised that while they themselves may have felt it was normal they may also have been acutely aware that their gambling was perceived as deviant and stigmatised by others in the community. Hence going someway to explain why young people do not seek help. Certainly the participants in this study who had commenced gambling in their youth, as peers moved on, and as they suffered the consequences of gambling came to view their own behaviour as problematic. It could therefore be speculated that early youth gambling may be justified by the young person as a sensible and recreational activity but as it progresses they learn that their gambling isn't normal.

Other explanations interacting with the normalisation process

Intergenerational trauma and individual traumatic experiences were described by some participants as reasons why young people may gamble and continue to gamble. A quantitative study conducted with indigenous people in Canada showed that factors such as sexual abuse were associated with probable pathological gambling among Indigenous people (Dion et al, 2015, 56). Given that the findings from this study are largely derivative of a sample from a community with a significant Indigenous population, the notion of intergenerational trauma may have merit but requires further investigation. Menzies (2006) constructed a model on ways in which trauma and intergenerational trauma could explain why homelessness was prevalent among Indigenous men. The model suggests that past public policy that 'enforced assimilation, segregation and integration of generations of Aboriginal children into mainstream Eurocentric culture' has resulted in individual, familial and community trauma (Menzies, 2006). The same explanation could be applied to Indigenous Australians who also have a history of abuse related to colonialization and public policy. Menzies (2006) writes that public policies disrupted the 'relational ties' in Indigenous communities and has created a population 'vulnerable' to many 'threatening conditions'. The trauma that has occurred as a result of the forced disintegration of cultural practices such as the loss of language, spiritual beliefs and a sense of belonging to family or kinship network has resulted in a number of negative social conditions that exist in Indigenous communities around the world (Menzies, 2006). These losses and negative social conditions continue to impact on new generations of young people.

To some extent it could be hypothesized given that many participants named intergenerational gambling as the issue, that perhaps younger generations lack a sense of self and experience meaninglessness resulting in dysfunctional coping strategies such as gambling, all of which could have been transmitted from past and present family and community trauma. The affected others in this study stated that reconnection is needed in order to deal with youth gambling. Nevertheless this study did not investigate 'transgenerational transmission' (Braga, Mello and Fiks, 2012) of parents and grandparents experiences on young people. Other participants mentioned their own personal trauma as precipitating gambling and other problems. It was not explored whether the trauma had also been intergenerational.

The interaction between normalisation and trauma needs to be explored further. There are various research papers that make a connection between trauma and addiction. Most conclude that childhood trauma precipitates various forms of substance abuse in adolescence (Lu et al, 2017; Chasser, 2016; Rich, Wilson and Robertson, 2016; and Petering, 2016)

. Whilst these studies focus on substance abuse, further research would probably expose gambling as related to childhood trauma. However, on the flip side resilience can also be transmitted (Braga, Mellow and Fiks, 2012), and it might be argued that the survival and success of many Indigenous people and the population in general is evidence that resilience can precipitate people surviving, developing and growing despite experiencing great adversity. This situation gives clues as to how early intervention and prevention strategies should proceed.

It is argued then that broader systemic conditions perpetuate and exacerbate individual experiences such as social and public policy which impact on individuals, families and communities and can cause a range of other economic and social disadvantages. Individuals can be impacted in terms of a lack of a sense of self, lack of meaningfulness, low self-esteem, low self-confidence, emotional instability and difficulties in forming relationships, which at the family level might precipitate family violence, abuse of substances, gambling, lack of attachments formed between parents and children, and a denial of cultural heritage (Menzies, 2006). All of which can inhibit educational experiences needed to participate in society. At the community level when those in the community experience significant problems as described above the community might lack 'cultural opportunities', 'lack cohesion' and have low levels of 'social capital' (like 'trust', 'reciprocal helping' and 'social engagement') (Menzies, 2006).

The hidden nature of youth gambling

To some extent it could be argued that youth gambling in the small rural community, among the Indigenous population is not a hidden addiction on one level given the response from this community to the research. This is one thing that might distinguish small rural communities from larger rural communities. The smaller the population the more aware members of the community are about what other members of that community are doing given issues regarding confidentiality and anonymity. Nevertheless it was described by participants from the small rural community as hidden to a certain extent as those young people gambling considered their behaviour as 'normal' and hence did not seek assistance. It could be argued that addiction largely remains hidden unless it is perceived as a problem by the person gambling. Here the normalisation theory to some extent interacts with the fact that young people who may have an addiction are not cognisant of the problem because they do not experience the loss and devastation caused by ongoing gambling into adult years. Further to this, because it is an acceptable family activity it might be perceived by young people as unproblematic.

The nature of service delivery in small rural communities could also contribute to the hidden nature of youth gambling, given that populations of these communities are expected to travel for most if not all support services. Services that do visit these small rural communities may not necessarily identify gambling as a problem as it is difficult to detect given that there are no physical signs, like the smell of alcohol or slurred speech. This makes it easier for people to hide their gambling behaviour. Further to this, because staff are not permanently in the community they may not observe gambling behaviour in the community and again it remains hidden. What was interesting is that the participants in this study had no difficulties in accessing information, education and support regarding drug and alcohol issues but not gambling, and they perceived gambling as just as significant.

Nevertheless there was no indication that gambling behaviour of youth in the larger rural community was any more visible to service providers, despite access to local Gamblers Help services, given that service providers felt that other issues were more pronounced for the youth they were helping. It could also be argued that despite location behavioural addictions like gambling are perceived as character flaws and less of an addiction than substance abuse (Thege et al, 2015, 24) hence people with gambling issues possibly feel stigmatised and don't seek help or make the assumption they can just stop if they make that choice. The findings of this study certainly indicated that young people do not consider gambling as an issue until they notice their peers being able to stop gambling and they find they can't stop.

There was some concern about youth gambling online and the inability of others to know what youth are doing when they are pre-occupied on their mobile phones or other devices. Research is inconclusive regarding the impact of technology on young people. There are some concerns that online gambling is going to be a significant problem for young people and research has found that young people will gamble online more than adults (Miller, 2017, 4). Nevertheless there was also research that indicated young people were discerning and wary of online gambling simulated games (Skinner et al, 2004). Research by Gainsbury et al, (2015, 39) whilst not a study specifically about youth found that online gamblers only were less likely to experience gambling problems compared to land based gambling and people that did both forms of gambling. Certainly in this study while participants were concerned about youth gambling online, it was reported that youth were seemingly at this point more involved in land based gambling i.e. cards, EGMs. Online gambling addiction for youth may be a real thing but will it become a public health issue. It is possible that there is some 'degree of a moral panic common to all new media' (Markey and Ferguson, 2017, 195).

Whilst online gambling options have been described as 'pervasive' and that there is a need for public policy to regulate online gambling (Deans, Thomas, Daube and Derevensky, 2016, 118), the findings from this research would suggest that gambling needs to be addressed in relation to possible root causes, that is addressing the underlying issues that drive people to develop gambling problems. It is understandable that it is easier for governments to impose regulations for example on internet gambling sites but without focusing on intergenerational poverty and trauma it is likely that gambling will remain an issue alongside other negative social conditions.

Practice Implications for Gamblers Help Service

In this study many of the participants from the Indigenous community blamed parental behaviour for youth gambling, which interestingly reflects discourse of some professionals who construct 'Indigenous families as pathological' (Maxwell, 2014) and needing to change. However, other participants discussed more about the 'trauma discourse' (Maxwell, 2014) and its impact on parents and hence young people. In terms of healing and preventing maladaptive coping strategies like gambling, the focus needs to be at all levels – the community, the family and the individual and it needs to consider unacknowledged trauma and the consequences. It is likely that the initial strategy would be for the Gamblers Help counsellors to immerse themselves in the Indigenous community that was a part of this study and share local and 'social histories', to conceptualise intergenerational trauma as well as resilience and to understand the need for a 'collective identity' (Maxwell, 2014). It will take time to build relations and trust but if sensitively

approached the next step will be to work with the Indigenous community towards co-developing an appropriate therapeutic approach and community education and awareness strategies.

In terms of youth gambling in general in rural communities, the Gamblers Help service now needs to approach local youth service providers and engage in a discussion about the characteristics and reality of youth gambling. That is helping other service providers to understand the hidden nature of gambling for youth and understand the importance of asking the question about gambling with youth who present with complex issues. It is possible with the presentation of the findings of this study that connections and memorandums of understanding could be facilitated between Gamblers Help and Youth Services. The outcome will be better cross referrals and management of a young person with complex issues including gambling.

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