



Electronic Gambling Machine Harm in Older Women

A public health determinant perspective

This research explored the gambling attitudes and behaviors of 20 Australian women aged 55 and over who had a range of self-reported negative experiences with EGM gambling. The study showed that harm from electronic gambling machines (EGMs) in older women is shaped by a combination of individual, social, environmental and commercial factors.

The determinants of harm

The interplay of four determinants contributes to harmful EGM gambling in older women.

1 Individual and social

- Stress, escape and anxiety
- Loneliness and social isolation
- Grief, loss and major life transitions
- Family problems (conflict, violence, divorce, death of a spouse)
- Retirement, boredom and loss of purpose
- Desire for companionship, connection and feeling included

2 Environmental

- Venues perceived as safe and welcoming spaces for women
- Friendly staff offer a supportive atmosphere
- Easy access through location, transport, and parking
- Gambling machines available at all times
- Venues seen as places for social connection and support

3 Commercial

- Addictive nature of machines (sounds, lights, speed, nears)
- Free food and drinks incentivising play and longer stays
- Framing of gambling as 'entertainment' and 'normal fun'
- Lack of clear information about risks
- No clear separation between the role of venues and harm prevention

4 Harmful EGM gambling

- Regular gambling (becoming routine)
- Escalating time and money spent on EGMs
- Gambling moves from social activity to coping mechanism
- Struggles to stop or cut back
- Negative impacts on finances, relationships, health and wellbeing



It just started with a few dollars, you know, once a week or something like that, or just going out for dinner with the girls from work. And then, depending on how unhappy I was at home it might be twice a week, three times a week.

– 63 year old woman



You're looking for some excitement. Sadly, the machines give you that excitement. I mean, it's a pretty pathetic sort of excitement. But it is excitement nonetheless. And that's powerful. That's very powerful. When you're looking for something

– 62 year old woman



It was safe for me, as a woman, and an older woman. I was in my 50s then I suppose. That I could go there on my own. And you know, they had security guards. They had friendly staff. I felt welcomed.

– 27 year old woman

Why current approaches fall short

- Focus on individual responsibility and willpower
- Place blame on women
- Do not reflect the real-life contexts of older women
- Messages about 'responsible gambling' are often ignored or dismissed
- Do not address the role of venues, machines and industry practice

What public health actions should do

- ✓ Address all determinants, not just individual behaviour
- ✓ Regulate the design and availability of EGMs
- ✓ Reduce exposure to harmful gambling environments
- ✓ Improve transparency about machine risks
- ✓ Create community supports that reduce loneliness and promote wellbeing



BASED ON: McCarthy, S., Pitt, H., Bellringer, M.E. and Thomas, S.L., 2022. Electronic gambling machine harm in older women: a public health determinants perspective. *Addiction Research & Theory*, 30(1), pp.41-50.