

Gambling addiction influenced by room design

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Rooms where gambling machines are tightly clumped in ways that discourage social interaction are more likely to result in heavy and problematic gambling, according to an Auckland gambling addiction expert.

"These rooms, known as [gambling](#) 'annexes' as opposed to 'main halls' encourage uninterrupted and solitary play include," says Professor Peter Adams from the University of Auckland's Centre for Addiction Research. "They are also characterised by an absence of tables to socialize around, dimmed lighting and entry pathways that minimize scrutiny."

"We argue that these features promote a style of play more oriented towards heavy and problematic gambling," he says.

In a paper, published this week in the journal of *Health and Place*, Professor Adams with co-author Dr Janine Wiles, says that by examining a series of common layouts they divided venues into those two main areas.

One area was for the main social activities of the venue (the main hall) and the other, a partitioned area (the annex) in which gambling machines were tightly spaced together.

"The widespread proliferation of electronic gambling machines and improvements to their design have contributed to rising levels of

gambling-related harm including harms associated with addictive behaviour and other impacts on health and wellbeing," says Professor Adams.

"Until now, research into their addictive potential has focused mainly on the interface between gamblers and the machines themselves," he says. "We shift the focus onto the spatial contexts, the rooms and the venues, in which [gambling machines](#) are positioned."

"We also explore explanations for the nature of these annexes and discuss implications for public health," says Professor Adams.

He says that public health approaches to gambling argue that the way gambling is regulated and the environments in which play occurs, can play a big role in managing gambling-related harms.

"Unfortunately the potential for [public health interventions](#) to impact on the profitability of gambling acts as a disincentive for those who have become reliant on the proceeds, including government agencies and community groups.

"We contend that the gambling machine annex is the main enabling space for generating such harms and yet we understand little about how they function," he says.

"Further effort is needed to explore ways in which these sites could provide the locus for [public health](#) interventions."

Four areas for future investigation could include:

- Research: Expand and resource gambling research beyond the narrow focus on the player and machine and towards a recognition of the role the annex in promoting problem

gambling. This would also incorporate further development of theories that explain the function of these spaces.

- Regulations on venue design: Explore regulations that effectively reduce the capacity of these spaces to enable excessive solitary gambling. This could involve legislation that requires annexes to include areas for socializing and features that promote gambler visibility within the venue.
- Regulations on sensory features: Examine what aspects of the annex environment foster entry into the addictive psychological space labelled the 'zone' and whether reducing these aspects lead to reduction in harm potential.
- Regulations on access-ways: Further research is required on the extent to which heavy and problem gamblers are able to enter these annexes anonymously, to play uninterrupted without being observed, then to leave without being noticed.

"We finish by asking some key questions: Is the addiction-enabling potential of the gambling machine annex of sufficient concern to seek out ways of changing these venue configurations? Is there a role for policy and legislation in reshaping these environments? Could gambling venues of the future be designed in ways that are less conducive to [problem gambling](#) by, for example, distributing machines through the main hall where players are visible to all around and where their play interacts with other social activities?."

More information: Peter J. Adams et al, Gambling machine annexes as enabling spaces for addictive engagement, *Health & Place* (2017). [DOI: 10.1016/j.healthplace.2016.11.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2016.11.001)

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