



A synthesis of explanations for spatial inequalities in gambling harm: integrating social and material dimensions of place

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ABSTRACT

Place matters for understanding patterns of gambling harm as shown by the spatial clustering of both ‘vulnerable’ people and gambling outlets. Harms are experienced at a community level (and never restricted to individuals) and are spread unequally across communities of place. Following the liberalisation of gambling laws in the UK in the 1990s, gambling outlets and advertising have proliferated in many economically disadvantaged places, with the gambling industries in some cases appearing to target these areas. Despite growing recognition of place-based inequalities in the harms caused by gambling, there have been limited efforts to understand gambling as a spatial practice that reflects and produces inequalities in health. This paper presents a synthesis of theories and explanations in the social science and public health literature about the unequal harms from gambling experienced by people in different places. We draw on a socio-material approach in our synthesis to show how different assemblages of gambling products, venues, marketing materials and collective histories form in different localities to influence different gambling practices with varying consequences for health. The synthesis foregrounds how different levels of power and influence in the production, regulation and experience of space across communities shape i) the meanings of gambling as a social practice and ii) the collective resources of communities to protect themselves from gambling harms. The analysis thus points to socio-material spaces as sites for interventions to reduce inequalities in harm.

1. Introduction

Place matters for understanding patterns of gambling harm as shown by the spatial clustering of people considered more ‘susceptible’ to harm and spatial clustering of gambling outlets (Evans and Cross, 2021: 5; Wardle et al., 2017). Gambling includes land-based and remote activities categorized for regulation by the United Kingdom (UK) UK Government (2005) as lottery play, gaming (including casinos and electronic gaming machines (EGMs) and betting (such as horse racing). Gambling harms include general harms (stress and anxiety, shame and stigma, poorer self-reported physical health, increased tobacco, alcohol

and substance use), crisis harms (suicide, domestic abuse and violence) and legacy harms (obesity, cultural harms, life course harms and inter-generational harms) (Browne et al., 2017; Marionneau et al., 2022). Harms are therefore not restricted to individuals but impact communities of place, experience and identity across generations (Langham et al., 2015). Harms are not spread evenly across communities of place. In England, socio-economically disadvantaged areas experience greater harms from gambling despite lower overall participation (Public Health England, 2021; Wheaton et al., 2024). Some gambling products are associated with greater harms: land-based casino products, electronic gaming machines (EGMs), betting on sports and non-sports events,

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National Lottery online instant wins and non-National Lottery scratchcards (Gambling Commission, 2025) although the harmfulness of different products changes over time (Marionneau et al., 2024).

Public health research focuses on individuals experiencing the most severe harms, at the neglect of community-level harms (Delfabbro and King, 2019). People with lived experience of gambling harms reject the stigmatizing term ‘problem gambler’ (GMCA et al., 2024), widely used to discuss patterns of gambling harm on the basis of the Problem Gambling Severity Index (Gambling Commission, 2025). In New Zealand it is estimated that aggregate harms accruing to non-‘problem gamblers’ exceed those occurring to ‘problem gamblers’ by 4:1 (Browne et al., 2017) with international evidence of a prevention paradox where the prevalence of gambling harms, including severe harms, are higher in combined lower risk categories compared to the high-risk problem-gambling category (Browne and Rockloff, 2018). Furthermore, it is estimated that gambling harms to any individual affect, on average, six other people, with general population prevalence estimates for affected others ranging from 4.5 to 21.2 % (Dowling et al., 2025). The spread of secondary harms across communities is also unequal. People in the most disadvantaged areas of the UK are more likely to be classed as an affected other (Gosschalk et al., 2023).

The emphasis on severe harms to individuals has influenced two distinct areas of public health research focused on identifying: i) behavioural and ii) environmental risk factors for gambling harm. This separation of people and the context in which they live provides limited opportunities to integrate emerging explanations for patterns of harm, as has been argued in relation to broader patterns of place-based health inequalities (Bambra, 2022). The list of groups “most susceptible to harm” (Public Health England, 2021) is expanding, identifying population groups on the basis of particular experiences such as unemployment or living on a low incomes, homelessness, having lower education levels, belonging to a minoritised ethnic group and being a young person (Sharman et al., 2019; Wardle et al., 2017; Public Health England, 2021; Marionneau et al., 2022). Since the early 2000s a growing body of research has explored environmental risk factors (Price et al., 2021) demonstrating links between gambling outlet density, socio-economic status and harm (Evans and Cross, 2021; Wardle et al., 2014) and, more recently, exposure to advertising (McGrane et al., 2023).

Separation of individual and behavioural risk factors for harm in research has led the focus of public health practice towards behavioural interventions (NICE, 2025), considered less intractable than industry practices (Cowlshaw and George, 2025). The UK Government’s framing of gambling “primarily in terms of economic activity and consumerism” (Reith and Wardle, 2022: 72) continues to support a public discourse of individual responsibility for harms (Even et al., 2024).

Research beyond public health demonstrates that gambling practices and their social meaning vary across communities of place, identity and experience usefully conceptualising gambling as a social practice rooted in particular localities (e.g. Cassidy, 2010). There have been limited attempts to understand spatial patterns of gambling harm using these insights. This paper seeks to address this gap through a review of the social science and public health literature explaining place-based inequalities in gambling harm.

2. Methodology

A participatory theory synthesis was conducted to identify, collate, evaluate and synthesise the range of explanations for unequal gambling harms between places (Pound and Campbell, 2015). To help make sense of existing theory/explanations and to increase focus on issues valued by stakeholders (Salway et al., 2020) a national learning partnership (NLP) was formed to co-design and implement the review with 53 stakeholders with a remit for addressing harms from gambling and other health-harming commodities (e.g. alcohol). Local and national government, and the community and voluntary sector were represented from varied parts of England, reflecting the geographical remit of the research funder. Drawing on methods of co-production (Banks and Brydon-Miller, 2018) the scope of the research was agreed collaboratively. Engagement took place via an online platform, one-to-one meetings and four virtual workshops. The NLP supported identification of key papers, interpretation of findings and design of dissemination materials.

Using the example of Whitehead et al. (2016), we used a staged approach to identify evidence for our review aim, combining a traditional, structured search for theory with ‘pearl-growing’ techniques to accumulate citations on the basis of papers considered core to our aim

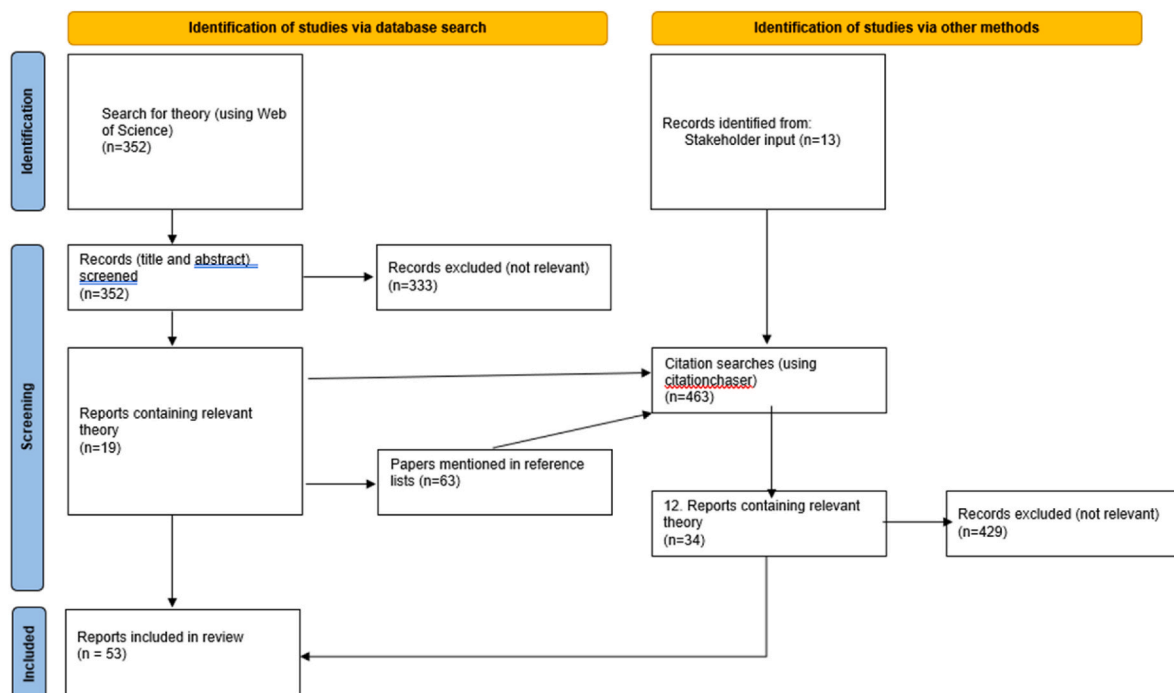


Fig. 1. Flow diagram of study selection process.

(Schlosser et al., 2006). An initial search for explanations was run in July 2023 using Web of Science Social Science Citation Index by an information specialist using the BeHEMoTh (Behaviour, Health context, exclusions, Model/Theory) framework (Booth and Carroll, 2015). This retrieved 19 papers (see Fig. 1). A second phase of searching was carried out on a subset of papers from this search and those suggested by stakeholders for backward and forward citation searching using citation chaser (n = 13). As the review progressed, additional relevant theories were identified from the citation lists of included literature until saturation was reached in terms of the range of explanations found.

To be included, papers had to contain all of the following components:

1. an explanation for any health harms from gambling, with health broadly conceived to include wellbeing and feelings of belonging
2. an explanation located at group rather than individual, level (excluding for example psychological or genetic explanations)
3. relevance to populations in high income countries given the similarities in market and legal contexts
4. a focus on any dimension of inequality (e.g. geographic location, race, ethnicity, age, class, gender, migration status)
5. an explanation related to the material/physical and/or social dimensions of place

Four researchers (KP, LF, EM, AS) and one member of the NLP (SN) extracted explanations for unequal harms related to place. Following Pound and Campbell's (2015) directive that theory synthesis should be for practical use, we identified the characteristics, purpose and scope of the theories, identified which elements were repeated and which were unique. Through discussion between the authors and engagement with the NLP, Waitt et al.'s (2023) framework for understanding gambling harms was agreed to provide a good fit for our emerging categories of explanations. The framework provided a means to examine interactions between the social and material dimensions of place featured in included papers, using space as a relational and dynamic conceptualisation of the settings in which gambling harms emerge. The explanations were subsequently categorized by adapting the framework, as explained in the findings section below, to better reflect our focus on inequalities in harm.

3. Findings

A total of 53 papers with explanations for place-based inequalities in gambling harm were identified. Though some papers had a global focus, the majority were conducted in or reviewed literature from specific high-income countries; Australia (n = 16) and the UK (n = 11) were mostly frequently represented. Included papers considered a broad range of dimensions of inequality, with some papers focusing on one specific dimension, and others considering multiple dimensions and their intersection. These dimensions included: age, gender, socioeconomic status, social class, ethnicity, Indigenous and migration status. The included papers focused on a wide range of gambling settings including casinos, betting shops, bingo halls, pubs, private residences and online settings. A range of gambling products were referenced, including EGMs, cards, lottery, bingo and sports and horse racing. Many papers included a range of gambling activities and some did not clearly define a focus on any specific gambling setting or product. Included papers used a range of study designs, including: qualitative empirical research, literature reviews (including theory, narrative, rapid, scoping and systematic reviews), secondary data analysis and one opinion piece. The majority of papers were written by authors with disciplinary backgrounds in public health or sociology; a smaller subset had backgrounds in geography, women's studies, anthropology and leisure studies.

Unequal harms from gambling between places can be understood using a spatial framework, adapted from the work of Waitt et al. (2023)



Fig. 2. Adapted from Waitt et al., 2023

(see Fig. 2). Our framework explains how the three sets of relationships that we found in the literature are connected. Waitt et al.'s original framework focuses on the assemblage¹ of social and material things in particular localities to explain the development of gambling harms. In this respect, place is more usefully defined in terms of the people and material things that repeatedly assemble in particular localities. These socio-material assemblages are dynamic (but not always transient) and reproduced through continued interactions of a range of human and non-human actors, including industry, regulators and people taking part in gambling. This perspective shifts attention from individual behaviour of 'consumers' to how products, people and practices affect each other when they come together in different configurations in specific localities. The papers demonstrate how gambling practices are shaped by different combinations of people and material entities (e.g. buildings, machinery) that assemble in particular localities, impacting people's sensory immersion and social entanglement in gambling. These combinations - or assemblages - work together to produce specific kinds of atmospheres.² Atmospheres generate affects: a 'hit' to the senses and a set of preconscious bodily feelings (Wetherell, 2012). As such, different assemblages may influence varied outcomes for different people embedded in them.

Following Waitt et al. (2023), we use Anderson's (2009) notion of 'affective atmospheres' to describe explanations that show how people's prior experiences and expectations shape how they experience the atmosphere in a gambling space. We also use Waitt et al.'s (2023) notion of 'orientation' to summarise explanations focused on how people's past experiences and expectations shape their orientation to gambling spaces. We adapted the third element of Waitt et al.'s (2023) framework ('intimacy'), to explore explanations focussed on how different gambling assemblages are drawn together in ways that reflect unequal levels of power and control across place-based communities. The explanations showed that gambling atmospheres and people's orientations are shaped by the degree to which groups, collectively, can control their

¹ Assemblage is a concept developed by philosophers Deleuze and Guattari, 1987. It highlights how the capacity to act, or 'agency', does not just belong to individuals, but rather is distributed in socio-material constellations of people, objects, and narratives (McFarlane and Anderson, 2011).

² The concept of atmosphere concerns "the grounding of social activity in place, or, more precisely the 'entanglement' of bodies in the elemental features of the spaces where they act or dwell" (Brown et al., 2019: 6).

living environment. All three sets of explanations are interdependent and influence the meaning of gambling and the resources people have to prevent and manage harms. Each dimension of our framework is presented separately below with examples of the explanations that fit within them.

3.1. Immersion in gambling atmospheres

Combinations of material things and people that come together to make up gambling experiences create different atmospheres. This category helps synthesise explanations in the literature emphasising how people simultaneously shape and respond to the atmospheres of gambling sites. Papers considered the immediate built and social environment in which gambling takes place (a venue or online application) but also the wider day-to-day spaces and places that people occupy. The papers demonstrate how such atmospheres normalise gambling and create greater likelihood of gambling consumption and harms. Power dynamics infuse gambling atmospheres and through intentional design, they are not intended to affect people in the same way (Kindynis, 2019). In this section, we explore explanations about how gambling atmospheres are manipulated to increase consumption, and therefore the likelihood of harm. We then turn to explanations that draw attention to the particular role that atmospheres play in masking risk. Lastly, we explore explanations that highlight the place-based nature of immersion in gambling atmospheres.

3.1.1. Gambling atmospheres are manipulated to increase the likelihood of consumption

Strategically designed spaces can elicit potentially harmful dispositions and behaviours. Affect - or “the preconscious ‘background’ to the experiential foreground of sensation, feeling, thought and action” (Kindynis, 2019: 621; Campbell, 2013; Young, 2010: 85) – can be manipulated through spatial design in ways that encourage such dispositions and behaviours. For example, casinos are designed to resemble mazes in order to confuse visitors and encourage gambling for the purpose of maximising profits (Kindynis, 2019). The strategic design of gambling atmospheres is not limited to casinos: for example, poker machines are designed to produce overuse and a loss of control by blocking other sensory input and inducing extended play (MacLean et al., 2019), and EGMs include design features such as flashing lights and sound effects for the same purpose (Kindynis, 2019).

3.1.2. Gambling atmospheres can mask risk

Immersion in gambling atmospheres can lead to harm through the masking of risk. Waitt et al. (2020) develop the concept of ‘home territory’ to explore this. Focusing on sports gambling applications, they draw attention to how affective dimensions of gambling create provisional ‘home’ territories based on desires for comfort and safety. In the presence of male friends, the affective experience of sports betting applications reterritorialise pubs as places for men who gamble. Atmospheres are key, as the same affective dimensions of these applications when used in the presence of family in domestic spaces instead created a sense of guilt (Waitt et al., 2023: 633). The feeling of being ‘at home’ in gambling spaces generates a sense of belonging and masks the risks of gambling. The masking of risk also applies to land-based gambling settings. The provision of food and security at casinos was described as inviting by isolated older women in Australia experiencing social isolation (McCarthy et al., 2021). The location of EGMs in certain community contexts (e.g. clubs) and the marketisation of gambling venues as ‘family friendly’ spaces target women and may result in risks becoming masked (Palmer du Preez, 2021).

3.1.3. Gambling is part of other common routines of living in a place

Affective atmospheres vary across geographic areas and venues, therefore producing differential experiences across socio-demographic factors including gender and class. Moving beyond immediate

gambling atmospheres, the normalisation of gambling in mainstream culture affects disadvantaged groups more via targeted, concentrated messaging through advertising and increased exposure to opportunities to gamble. Place-based exposure to gambling advertising, alongside exposure to gambling in general, has been shown to increase young people’s likelihood of gambling (Frey, 1984; Nyemcsok et al., 2022; Raybould et al., 2021). Evidence suggests that advertising can have stronger impacts on children and young people and those already at risk from current gambling activity with those most vulnerable more likely to be influenced (McGrane et al., 2023).

Gambling risks multiply when venues are situated near amenities connected to everyday routines, including supermarkets (Waitt et al., 2023: 630). The co-location of gambling and everyday practices like food shopping normalises gambling, masking risks while increasing the likelihood of gambling consumption. Gambling risks may also increase when venues are located near premises selling alcohol (Reith and Dobbie, 2013), or when gambling opportunities and the sale of alcohol co-exist, such as in certain types of sports bars (Pennay et al., 2020). Gambling is also normalised through its presence in other community settings, such as churches and sports venues (Browne et al., 2017).

The normalisation of place-based gambling in everyday activities can be spatially patterned and reproduce socio-spatial inequalities (Price et al., 2021). The gambling industry is believed to target vulnerable demographic groups with high density gambling venues (John et al., 2020). It is well established that communities with fewer economic resources have a higher prevalence of opportunities to gamble (e.g. Adeniyi et al., 2020; Townshend, 2016; Wardle et al., 2014). As Abbott et al. (2018) point out, gambling consumption and harms are more common in communities situated close to land-based gambling venues like casinos (e.g. St-Pierre et al., 2014; Fad et al., 2007). In the UK, betting shops are more prevalent in economically deprived areas (UK Parliament, 2020), and those living close to licensed betting venues have been found to have higher rates of gambling problems (Astbury and Wardle, 2016). As Adeniyi et al. (2020) and Townshend (2016) point out, this may be seen as a deliberate targeting of those with the least capacity to resist.

3.2. Orientation in space and the development of gambling practices and harms

A second set of explanations emphasised people’s differing orientations towards spaces in which gambling is promoted and available. Drawing on Waitt’s (2023: 634) notion of orientation, we summarise here explanations that describe how people orient themselves in spaces in ways that reflect their “familiarity with certain everyday routines and social expectations”. Such expectations reflect past experiences of other spaces, embodied over time. The intersection of class, gender, racialisation and other dynamics in past experiences infuse people’s expectations of spaces. The explanations here therefore do not rely on an understanding of people’s characteristics as fixed predispositions toward gambling harms. Rather, the papers show how people’s sense of identity in a space is contingent on the socio-material conditions of the space and past experiences through which current conditions are interpreted. Space becomes a helpful lens for analysis since people with shared experiences and identities are likely to cluster in particular localities (due to similar preferences, needs, and resources) and people in specific localities may develop shared experiences and identities. Two pathways to greater harm from particular orientations were described: i) an orientation towards gambling spaces as a site for identity and belonging, and ii) an orientation towards gambling spaces as a site for income generation.

3.2.1. Orientation towards gambling spaces as a site for identity and belonging

Orientation to gambling spaces as a site for identity and belonging make people more likely to gamble in harmful ways; to experience

harmful gambling as normal and to neglect other potentially valuable social networks outside of gambling (Ocean and Smith, 1993). A broad set of experiences influence this orientation to gambling spaces: poverty (Breen et al., 2011), bereavement or relationship breakdown (McCarthy et al., 2019, 2021), migration (Amadiou and Hamilton, 2015; Browne et al., 2017), and racial and gender discrimination (Holdsworth et al., 2013; McCarthy et al., 2023). These experiences are linked to using gambling to alleviate stress (Amadiou and Hamilton, 2015; Browne et al., 2017; McCarthy et al., 2023; Rowlatt et al., 2023; Wardle et al., 2019; Colby et al., 2022), or social isolation and loneliness (McCarthy et al., 2019, 2021).

Gambling emerges as an accessible source of coping in the absence of alternatives. Palmer du Preez (2019) and McCarthy et al. (2021) discuss the distraction and comfort from caring responsibilities provided by local gambling facilities for women with few leisure alternatives. Gambling is described as an activity that people experiencing low social control can engage in with few barriers (e.g. language). Migrants to high-income countries, for example, may gamble as an expression of new-found independence if moving to countries with fewer cultural restrictions and/or reduced family oversight (Wardle et al., 2019). Migrants in the USA may visit gambling venues because there are a lack of culturally acceptable forms of leisure activities in a new location (Colby et al., 2022). For indigenous populations in Australia, gambling helps some cope with negative feelings of being unable to fully participate in society (Breen and Gainsbury, 2013).

Gambling is viewed by some as an egalitarian world where ascribed identities become less relevant and individuals can earn a higher social status. Ethnographic work in Canada revealed how casinos provide a place for regular gamblers to reap social rewards in the form of group affiliation, emotional support, social status and salient identities (Ocean and Smith, 1993). Gambling was seen by people experiencing homelessness in Australia as providing benefits otherwise unattainable, like access to valued cultures and identities (Holdsworth and Tiyce, 2013). Similarly, Casey (2019) finds that gambling is used among working-class groups to perform group identity in the context of consumer society. Consumption practices are inextricably linked to the reproduction and formation of classed selfhoods; individuals practice a refusal of the stigmatizing judgements of others through gambling practices (Casey, 2019; Frey, 1984).

Development of social bonds linked to gambling can lead to erosion of broader social ties, with a deepening of gambling ties. Studying horse race gambling, sports betting, and poker, Rosecrance (1986) found that regular gamblers in North America go through a process of socialisation that involves developing reciprocal social ties with fellow gamblers; as these ties deepen, people disengage from other networks. In the face of financial losses, participation in gambling remains part of a rational calculation because it facilitates meaningful social relationships (Rosecrance, 1986). Gambling can isolate individuals leading to stress and anxiety: losses may be associated with shame and regret which can perpetuate withdrawal from other social connections (Gupta and Stevens, 2021). Gambling losses that compound poverty only exacerbate isolation (Breen et al., 2011). When gambling loses the social component, it creates greater harm as the social aspect may be protective (Breen et al., 2011).

When people with diminished social networks develop problems from gambling, dealing with harms can be more difficult. A lack of a 'safety net' might make it difficult for migrants to deal with gambling losses (Bramley et al., 2020; Raybould et al., 2021). Across high-income countries, formal help-seeking by some migrants may be limited by awareness, cultural competence of services and cost (Bramley et al., 2020; Rowlatt et al., 2023), and varying cultural norms relating to stigma of gambling and help-seeking (Wardle et al., 2019; Rowlatt et al., 2023; Browne et al., 2017; Bramley et al., 2020). Palmer du Preez et al. (2021a) point to colonisation of Māori people in New Zealand leading to the erosion of collectivist cultures alongside the imposition of Eurocentric forms of gambling. Browne et al. (2017) point to differences

across communities of place and interest towards a shared sense of obligation for gambling losses as well as different collective resources to manage wider social, crime and health harms. Traditional Indigenous values of reciprocity and sharing may have a cumulative effect that spread through the community and result in financial hardship (Breen et al., 2011; Breen, 2012; Kolandai-Matchett et al., 2017) though the same reciprocity can support people experiencing gambling harm (Breen, 2012; Hing et al., 2012).

3.2.2. Orientation towards gambling spaces as a site for income generation

Gambling through financial motivation to change life circumstances can lead to problem gambling (McCarthy et al., 2023). A broad set of experiences influence an orientation to spaces as sites for income generation: living on a low wage or precarious income (Amadiou and Hamilton, 2015; Bramley et al., 2020; Colby et al., 2022); living in poverty needing to meet social obligations to pay debt (Hing et al., 2012); experiencing unequal status (Callan et al., 2011; Cassidy, 2010; 2014, 2019).

Economically marginalised groups may gamble as a form of economic justice seeking (Browne et al., 2017; Callan et al., 2011). Gambling can present an escape from economic frustration because it is seen as an alternative way to get rich and take risks, which Amadiou and Hamilton (2015) describes as a desire for control. In Germany, lottery play is reported as a coping mechanism to deal with frustrations and tensions resulting from contradictory or unattainable demands on people with limited social control (Beckert and Lutter, 2012). Browne et al. (2017) point to an increased susceptibility to the idea of "a big win" among people living in poverty. Maltzahn et al. (2022) found that in the context of intergenerational poverty as a legacy of land and wage theft and ongoing colonial violence, discrimination and racism, bingo appears as one of few viable pathways to access large sums of money. Similarly, Casey (2014) shows that for working class people, austerity in the UK intensified an anxious desire to be able to consume that gambling addressed. Personal relative deprivation translates into gambling urges and behavior in part via increased desires for immediate, even if smaller, rewards (Callan et al., 2011; Rowlatt et al., 2023).

3.3. Collective control over gambling spaces

This category concerns explanations regarding different levels of collective control across communities of place over the circumstances in which they live (Popay et al., 2021). We first consider papers that point to different capabilities across place-based communities to influence the availability of regulation of gambling venues in particular localities, and then turn to the role of productive power (which operates through institutional legitimisation of particular social discourses and practices) (Popay et al., 2021) and different capabilities held by communities of place to influence public discourses on gambling harm.

3.3.1. Collective control over licensing

Gambling operators are argued to target areas with low social capital, where communities are "less likely to mobilize to prevent their introduction" (Abbott et al., 2018: 90). A study of licenses for EGMs in disadvantaged regions of Australia highlights how difficult it can be to overturn licensing decisions (Marshall and Baker, 2001). This is similar to the licensing of casinos in the UK, which has been framed as crucial for regeneration in economically disadvantaged areas, making refusal of applications difficult (Bedford, 2011). Across these contexts, the state holds a "contradictory position", given its simultaneous reliance on revenue from gambling and its responsibility for regulating licensing decisions (Waite et al., 2023). The use of gambling to stimulate economic development therefore limits the ability of particular place-based communities to influence decision making.

3.3.2. Capability to influence public discourse on gambling harms

Societal values and power relations shape who is able to influence

how gambling and gambling harms are understood in public discourse (Palmer du Preez et al., 2021b). Discourses and responses to gambling harm can be disempowering and pathologizing because of their tendency to focus on the individual (Palmer du Preez, 2019; 2021b). As Cassidy (2010: 146) argues, it is vital to view discourses about ‘problem gambling’ and ‘responsible gambling’ critically rather than “merely absorb[ing]” these concepts as “the apparently neutral tools of our trade”. Gambling harm reduction is a ‘social practice’ that aims to reduce the “negative impact of gambling on the wellbeing of people, communities and populations” (Palmer du Preez et al., 2021b: 327). The social practice of gambling harm reduction draws on “diverse strategies and programmes” to do this (ibid; Reith, 2007; Livingstone and Adams, 2016). It is a practice linked to “medical, psychological, economic, and political fields of knowledge, and technologies of ‘truth production’ such as academic research” (ibid). For Reith (2007), gambling studies as a field of knowledge has been key in framing ‘problem gambling’ as a mental health issue, and in casting the ‘problem gambler’ as “suffering from treatable psychological issues such as impulsivity and irrationality” (Palmer du Preez et al., 2021b: 327). In these framings of gambling harm, the individual problem gambler is positioned as the locus of gambling problems.

As Palmer du Preez (2019, 2021b) explore in their research on women’s gambling, the problem gambler is typically constructed as male in gambling research. Against this backdrop, women who gamble are often configured as ‘vulnerable’ and ‘complex cases’, with a tendency to focus on passivity and emotionality. Mothers in particular are positioned “as in need of targeted intervention and education practices aimed at reducing the risk they pose” (Palmer du Preez et al., 2021b: 330). No comparable studies or reports of fathers who gamble could be identified by the authors (ibid). Psychological discourses tend to dominate gambling research on women, which the authors argue results in a focus on individual interventions while simultaneously reinforcing gender stereotypes that link “femininity with vulnerability, inefficacy and passivity”, and may be “experienced as disempowering” (ibid: 331).

Bingo and lottery play are two forms of gambling that have been at times associated with negative classed and gendered stereotypes (Bedford, 2011; Casey, 2006). While casinos have been a staple of urban regeneration in some high-income countries, bingo halls are argued to have been dismissed and trivialised by local development actors because of their symbolic associations with older women from lower-income backgrounds (Bedford, 2011). British working-class women who play the lottery are similarly argued to lack control in how gambling and gambling harm are constructed, and to negotiate norms of femininity by contrasting themselves with deviant ‘other’ women who they believe gamble irresponsibly (Casey, 2006). While recognising that their lottery play was susceptible to “criticism from surveillant others”, Casey’s research participants presented ‘counter-discourses’ about lottery play that guarded against constructions of it as “meaningless and wasteful spending” (ibid: 15).

Taken together, these studies demonstrate how power relations influence how gambling as a practice and gambling harms as a problem are understood. As we have seen previously, power relations are in turn embedded in spatial arrangements, with people with fewer resources and less access to power being more likely to live in deprived areas (Adeniyi et al., 2020; Evans and Cross, 2021).

4. Discussion

This paper presents a synthesis of theories and explanations in social science and public health literature about the unequal harms from gambling experienced by people in different places. Our review prioritised 53 papers covering all forms of gambling. We drew on a socio-material approach in our synthesis to show how different assemblages of gambling products, venues, marketing materials and place-based histories influence different gambling practices with varying consequences for physical and mental health. In doing so, the paper

foregrounds how different levels of power and influence in the production, regulation and experience of space across UK communities shape i) the meanings of gambling as a social practice and ii) the collective resources of communities to protect themselves from gambling harms.

Using the concept of space as an assemblage of social *and* material things, our framework provides a means to integrate social and material explanations for place-based patterns of inequality that have been separated in other summaries. For example, Wheaton et al.’s (2024) review of spatial inequalities and gambling harm drew attention to material explanations, such as the geographical clustering of EGMs and the provision of support for problem gambling. Wardle et al.’s (2017) work offers a dynamic view of the social aspects of place, conceptualising place-based populations in terms of the places people spend time as well as where they reside. We build on this work using the concepts of ‘atmosphere’ and ‘orientation’ which reflect an interdependence between individuals and their social and material environment, allowing the integration of apparently disparate drivers of unequal harm. By looking at the sets of explanations in combination, we were able to identify the broader social and political context in which gambling is taking place and identify common processes (such as gambling for financial gain) through which harm is developing unequally.

The concept of place as a *dynamic* assemblage of social and material elements helps draw out the *processes* through which harm develops. In identifying circumstances in which people may become vulnerable to gambling harms, and the role of affective atmospheres and collective control in shaping these circumstances, our work helps to “recognise the temporal, situational, relational, and structural nature of vulnerability” (Virokannas et al., 2018: 327). Vulnerability is a *process*, not a predisposition embedded in persons. We move away from viewing group circumstances (e.g. low socioeconomic status) as fixed characteristics by considering the broad set of *experiences* that could influence an orientation to gambling for social connection or financial gain. This better encapsulates how vulnerability develops over time and in particular spaces. We build on insights generated across multiple studies into the importance of normalisation in the development of gambling harms by showing *how* normalisation happens in particular socio-material contexts: our framework helps to explain how industry is able to target spaces through the generation of affective atmospheres that groups have differing levels of capacity to influence. This demonstrates how anyone may be made vulnerable to harms from gambling and the inadequacy of targeting those who may be more susceptible on the basis of apparent characteristics such as socioeconomic status.

The synthesis foregrounds how different levels of collective control over the production, regulation and experience of space across communities shape i) the meanings of gambling as a social practice and ii) the collective resources of communities to protect themselves from gambling harms. In their review of unequal gambling harms, Martin et al. (2024) similarly identified that gambling for financial motivation and a sense of identity may lead to greater harm. Our synthesis builds on this understanding by providing a spatial framework in which to locate these drivers of harm, emphasising the historical power imbalances rooted in place that shape such motivations for financial gain and identity. The emphasis in our explanatory framework on different degrees of collective control by groups and communities demonstrates how approaches to gambling harm that solely focus on individual characteristics exacerbate inequalities in gambling harm by stigmatizing communities who experience greater harms. The collective capacity of people - including people living in disadvantaged communities - to resist stigmatizing discourses was shown to contribute to people’s orientations towards gambling and the atmospheres that develop.

5. Implications for practice

The analysis identifies socio-material spaces where gambling takes

Table 1

Declared conflicts of interest and funding for included papers.

	Author	Date	Title	Author CoI ¹	Funding ²
1	Abbott, M. et al.	2018	Conceptual Framework of Harmful Gambling: Third Edition	CoI declared Abbot works for a research centre which occasionally receives funding from the gambling industry. Binde has received a minor grant from the Responsible Gambling Trust in the UK, a charity receiving economic support from gambling companies. Clark works within a research centre which receives funding from the Province of British Columbia and the British Columbia Lottery Corporation, a Crown Corporation that manages gambling provision across the province. Johnson has received funding from Gambling Research Exchange Ontario (GREO) and Alberta Health Services (AHS). He is a former professional poker player. Quilty receives funding from Canadian Institutes of Health Research, National Institutes of Health, American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, Ontario Brain Institute, Ontario Mental Health Foundation, Gambling Research Exchange Ontario, and Canadian Consortium for Gambling Research. Voldberg has acted as a consultant to individual gambling operators in the past. Walker has worked as advisor or consultant for industry groups, state governments, and consulting firms.	Declared GREO received funding from the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care.
2	Amadiou and Hamilton	2015	Deliberate risk taking with money: The consumption patterns of gambling	Undeclared	Undeclared
3	Beckert and M. Lutter	2012	Why the Poor Play the Lottery: Sociological Approaches to Explaining Class-based Lottery Play	Undeclared	Declared German Research Foundation (DFG) and the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies.
4	Bedford	2011	Getting the Bingo Hall Back Again? Gender, Gambling Law Reform, and Regeneration Debates in a District Council Licensing Board	Undeclared	Undeclared
5	Bramley et al.	2020	Exploring the support for UK migrants experiencing gambling-related harm: insights from two focus groups	CoI declared Bramley, Norrie and Manthorpe have received funding from Ridgeway Information Ltd in the last three years. Bramley has previously been employed by Citizens Advice Calderdale as a Gambling Support Service Trainer following GambleAware's partnership with Citizens Advice. The authors have also received funds from GambleAware, a national charity mandated by government to fund research into gambling harms. GambleAware receive their funding through voluntary donations from the industry but decisions about what research to fund and research questions are made by the UK Gambling Commission, the industry regulator, and are informed by the needs of the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.	Declared Funded by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and King's College London Interdisciplinary Research Fund and the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Policy Research Programme (Policy Research Unit in Health and Social Care Workforce: Ref. PR-PRU-1217-21002).
6	Breen	2012	Risk and Protective Factors Associated with Gambling Consequences for Indigenous Australians in North Queensland	No CoI declared	Undeclared
7	Breen, H. and S. M. Gainsbury	2013	Aboriginal Gambling and Problem Gambling: A Review	No CoI declared	Declared Ontario Problem Gambling Research Centre.
8	Breen, H. et al.	2011	Indigenous gambling motivations, behaviour and consequences in Northern New South Wales, Australia	No CoI declared	Declared Gambling Research Australia.
9	Browne, M. et al.	2017	Measuring the Burden of Gambling Harm in New Zealand	Undeclared	Declared New Zealand Ministry of Health.
10	Callan, M. J. et al.	2011	Personal relative deprivation, delay discounting, and gambling	Undeclared	Declared Ontario Problem Gambling Research Centre.
11	Casey, E	2006	Domesticating Gambling: Gender, Caring and the UK National Lottery	Undeclared	Undeclared
12	Casey, E	2019	Gambling, status anxiety and inter-generational social mobility: findings from the mass observation archive	Undeclared	Declared Economic and Social Research Council (Gambling and Households: New Gambling

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Table 1 (continued)

Author	Date	Title	Author Col ¹	Funding ²
13 Cassidy, R	2010	Gambling as exchange: horserace betting in London	Undeclared	Directive at Mass Observation Archive, ES-000-22-4314). Declared Economic and Social Research Council and the Responsible Gambling Fund.
14 Colby, M. H. et al.	2022	Unpacking the root causes of gambling in the Asian community: Contesting the myth of the Asian gambling culture	Col declared Author LL was employed by Vietnamese American Initiative for Development Inc. Authors BH, LL, DS, MY, and MTC were employed by ADAPT Coalition. Authors BH and MY were employed by Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center (BCNC).	Declared Massachusetts Gaming Commission (BD-19-1068- 1700–134614) and National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences, National Institutes of Health (UL1TR002544).
15 Fontaine, M. et al.	2023	Gambling and Aging: An Overview of a Risky Behavior	No Col declared	Declared Agence Nationale de la Recherche, France (234372 Jeuvieilli project–APPG 020–CE36)
16 Frey, J. H	1984	Gambling: A Sociological Review	Undeclared	Undeclared
17 Gordon, R. and G. Reith	2019	Gambling as social practice: a complementary approach for reducing harm?	Col declared RG has received funding for gambling research from the Australian Research Council and the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation. GR has received funding for gambling research from the Economic and Social Research Council, Sasakawa Foundation, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, Gambling Commission, Scottish Government, and Responsibility in Gambling Trust.	Undeclared
18 Gupta, H. and M. Stevens	2021	"It started 30 years ago, and it still haunts me": an exploratory investigation of Territorians' gambling behaviours, harm, and help-seeking for gambling issues in an Australian jurisdiction	No Col declared	Declared Northern Territory Government Department of Attorney General and Justice through the Community Benefit Fund.
19 Hing, N. et al.	2012	A Case Study of Gambling Involvement and Its Consequences	Undeclared	Declared Gambling Research Australia.
20 Holdsworth, L. et al.	2013	All mixed up together: women's experiences of problem gambling, comorbidity and co-occurring complex needs	Undeclared	Undeclared
21 Holdsworth, L. and M. Tiyce	2013	Untangling the complex needs of people experiencing gambling problems and homelessness	Undeclared	Undeclared
22 John, B. et al.	2020	Gambling Harm as a Global Public Health Concern: A Mixed Method Investigation of Trends in Wales	No Col declared	Declared University of South Wales and the research budgets of Members of the Welsh Parliament.
23 Kindynis, T	2019	Persuasion architectures: Consumer spaces, affective engineering and (criminal) harm	Undeclared	Declared No financial support.
24 Kolandai-Matchett, K. et al.	2017	How gambling harms experienced by Pacific people in New Zealand amplify when they are culture-related	No Col declared	Declared New Zealand Ministry of Health.
25 MacLean et al.	2019	Gambling in Two Regional Australian Aboriginal Communities: A Social Practice Analysis	No Col declared	Declared Commissioned by Mallee District Aboriginal Services and the Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Cooperative. Funded by the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation.
26 Maltzahn, K. et al.	2022	Increasing harms for bingo players: digitisation, commercialisation and regulatory inadequacy: a multi-site case study	No Col declared	Declared Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation.
27 McCarthy et al.	2021	Electronic gambling machine harm in older women: a public health determinants perspective	Col declared SM currently receives an Australian Government Research Training Program stipend from Deakin University for her PhD related to gambling and women. HP Has received funding from the Australian Research Council, the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation and the NSW Office of Responsible Gaming. MEB has received research grants in the last 5 years from the New Zealand Ministry of Health, KPMG and Homecare Medical (NZ) Ltd Partnership, and travel and related expenses from the Japan Academy of Integrated Resorts and Gaming Studies. She is a member of the Lotto NZ Responsible Gaming and Corporate Social Responsibility Voluntary Stakeholder Panel; she does not receive financial reimbursement for this role. ST currently receives funding from the Australian Research Council Discovery Grant Scheme, the Victorian Responsible Gambling	Undeclared

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Table 1 (continued)

Author	Date	Title	Author Col ¹	Funding ²
28 McCarthy et al.	2023	Young women's engagement with gambling: A critical qualitative inquiry of risk conceptualisations and motivations to gamble	<p>Foundation, and the New South Wales Office of Responsible Gaming for research relating to public health responses to gambling harm prevention. She has received travel expenses for gambling speaking engagements from the European Union, Beat the Odds Wales, the Office of Gaming and Racing ACT, and the Royal College of Psychiatry Wales. She is a member of the Responsible Gambling Advisory Board for Lotterywest. She does not receive financial reimbursement for this role.</p> <p>No Col declared but authors wish to make the following declarations:</p> <p>SM has received an Australian Government Research Training Program stipend from Deakin University for her PhD related to gambling and women.</p> <p>ST has received funding for gambling research from the Australian Research Council Discovery Grant Scheme, the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, Healthway, and the New South Wales Office of Responsible Gambling. She has received travel expenses for gambling engagements from the European Union, Beat the Odds Wales, the Office of Gaming and Racing ACT, SNSUS (Stiftelsen Nordiska Sällskapet för Upplysning om Spelberoende) and the Royal College of Psychiatry Wales. She is a member of the Responsible Gambling Advisory Board for LotteryWest. She does not receive any financial compensation for this role.</p> <p>HP has received funding for gambling research from the Australian Research Council Discovery Grant Scheme, VicHealth, Deakin University, the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation and the New South Wales Office of Responsible Gambling.</p> <p>SM has received support for gambling research from an Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship.</p> <p>MR has received funding for gambling research from the Australian Research Council Discovery Grant Scheme and the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation.</p> <p>SC currently receives funding from the Australian Research Council and the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation for gambling-related research. He has also received funding for mental health research from the National Health and Medical Research Council, the National Mental Health Commission, the Victorian Department of Health, the Victorian Department of Education & Training, The Teacher's Health Foundation, the State Trustees Australia Foundation, the Commonwealth Department of Veteran's Affairs and the Defence Health Foundation. SC has not knowingly received funding from the gambling industry or any industry sponsored organisation. He has participated in scholarly and policy related conferences and events which were sponsored by industry, but received no payment for involvement or expenses.</p> <p>SK holds a Research Chair on Gambling funded by the Fonds de Recherche du Québec-Société et Culture (FRQ-SC) and the Mise-sur-toi foundation. She received funding from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), the John Evans Leadership fund of the Canadian Foundation for Innovation, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC).</p> <p>MD has received funding for gambling research from the Australian Research Council Discovery Grant Scheme and the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation Grants Scheme.</p>	<p>Declared</p> <p>Australian Research Council Discovery Grant (DP190100695).</p>

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Table 1 (continued)

Author	Date	Title	Author Col ¹	Funding ²
29 McCarthy et al.	2019	Women and gambling-related harm: a narrative literature review and implications for research, policy, and practice	<p>Col declared</p> <p>SM has received funding for gambling research in the last year from an Australian Government Research Training Program scholarship.</p> <p>ST has received funding in the last 3 years for gambling research from the Australian Research Council and the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation. The Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation is funded via hypothecated taxes from gambling. She has also received consultancy funding for gambling harm prevention education from the AFL Players Association and AFL Sportsready. She has received travel funding for conference presentations from the Living Room Cardiff, the European Union, and the Australian Capital Territory Gaming and Racing Commission.</p> <p>MB has received funding in the last 3 years for gambling research from the New Zealand Ministry of Health.</p> <p>RC has, in the past 3 years, received travel expenses from Edinburgh University and the Graduate School for Humanities, University of Cologne. She has also received travel expenses from government departments and from organisations which derive their funding from government departments (including through hypothecated taxes on gambling) including the University of Helsinki Centre for Research on Addiction, Control and Governance; the Alberta Gambling Research Institute; the New Zealand Ministry of Health; the New Zealand Problem Gambling Foundation and The Gambling and Addictions Research Centre at Auckland University of Technology. She has also received funding to organise and run a conference from the British Academy. She has paid to attend industry-sponsored events and attended free, industry-supported events in order to conduct anthropological fieldwork.</p>	<p>Declared</p> <p>None</p>
30 McGrane et al.	2023	What is the evidence that advertising policies could have an impact on gambling-related harms? A systematic umbrella review of the literature	<p>Col declared</p> <p>HW is the Deputy Chair of Advisory Board for Safer Gambling and has had funding from the Gambling Commission and the Gambling Research Exchange Ontario, and travel funding from the Alberta Gambling Research Institute and Cyprus Betting and Gaming Commission.</p>	<p>Undeclared</p>
31 Neal, M	1998	You Lucky Punters! A Study of Gambling in Betting Shops	<p>Undeclared</p>	<p>Undeclared</p>
32 Nyemcsok, C. et al.	2022	Young men's perceptions about the risks associated with sports betting: a critical qualitative inquiry	<p>Col declared</p> <p>ST receives funding from the Australian Research Council Discovery Grant Scheme, the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, and the New South Wales Office of Responsible Gambling for research relating to public health responses to gambling harm prevention. She has previously received funding for gambling research from the Australian Research Council Discovery Grant Scheme, and the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, and Deakin University. She has received travel expenses for gambling speaking engagements from the European Union, Beat the Odds Wales, the Office of Gaming and Racing ACT, and the Royal College of Psychiatry Wales. She is a member of the Responsible Gambling Advisory Board for LotteryWest, and the International Confederation of Alcohol and other Drug Research Consortiums. She has provided expert evidence to a range of parliamentary inquiries, most recently the All Party Parliamentary Group on Gambling Harm in the United Kingdom. She does not receive any financial compensation for these roles.</p> <p>HP has received funding from the Australian Research Council, Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, the New South Wales</p>	<p>Declared</p> <p>This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.</p>

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Table 1 (continued)

Author	Date	Title	Author Col ¹	Funding ²
			Office for Responsible Gambling and Deakin University. PK has previously received funding from the Australian Research Council, National Health and Medical Research Council.	
33 Ocean, G. and G. J. Smith	1993	Social Reward, Conflict, and Commitment: A Theoretical Model of Gambling Behavior	Undeclared	Undeclared
34 Palmer du Preez, K. P. et al.	2019	A Mixed Methods Analysis of Gambling Harm for Women in New Zealand	Undeclared	Declared New Zealand Ministry of Health.
35 Palmer du Preez, K. P. et al.	2021a	Theoretically informed gender analysis for gambling harm reduction: a New Zealand study	No Col declared	Declared New Zealand Ministry of Health.
36 Palmer du Preez, K. P. et al.	2021b	Women in gambling studies: a poststructural analysis	No Col declared	Declared New Zealand Ministry of Health.
37 Pennay, A. et al.	2020	Sports bars: environmental design, drinking, and sports betting	No Col declared Individual authors funding: AP is supported by an Australian Research Council Discovery Early Career Researcher Award [190101074]. ML is supported by an NHMRC Career Development Fellowship [1123840]. RR is supported by a core grant to the Center for Alcohol Policy Research from the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE).	Declared Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation in partnership with the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation.
38 Pitt, H. et al.	2023	Older adults' perceptions of the risks associated with contemporary gambling environments: Implications for public health policy and practice	No Col declared but the authors have made the following declarations: HP has received funding for gambling research from the Australian Research Council Discovery Grant Scheme, the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, the New South Wales Office of Responsible Gambling, VicHealth, and Deakin University. SMC has received an Australian Government Research Training Program stipend from Deakin University for her Ph.D. related to gambling and women. She has received funding for gambling research from Deakin University. ST has received funding for gambling research from the Australian Research Council Discovery Grant Scheme, the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, the New South Wales Office of Responsible Gambling, Deakin University, and Healthway WA. She has received travel expenses for gambling speaking engagements from the European Union, Beat the Odds Wales, the Office of Gaming and Racing ACT, SNSUS (Stiftelsen Nordiska Sällskapet för Upplysning om Spelberoende), and the Royal College of Psychiatry Wales. She has received payment for peer review from the New South Wales Responsible Gambling Fund, and Gambling Research Australia. She is a member of the Responsible Gambling Advisory Board for LotteryWest and a board member of the International Confederation of Alcohol and Other Drugs Research Associations. She does not receive any financial compensation for these roles. SM has received an Australian Government Research Training Program stipend from Deakin University for her Ph.D. related to gambling. She has received funding for gambling research from Deakin University. MR has received funding for gambling research from the Australian Research Council Discovery Grant Scheme, and the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation. SK holds a Research Chair on Gambling funded by the Fonds de Recherche du Québec-Société et Culture (FRQ-SC) and the Mise-sur-toi foundation. She received funding from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), the John Evans Leadership fund of the Canadian	Declared Australian Research Council Discovery Grant (DP190100695).

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Table 1 (continued)

Author	Date	Title	Author Col ¹	Funding ²
			Foundation for Innovation, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). SC currently receives funding from the Australian Research Council and the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation for gambling-related research. He also received funding currently for mental health research from the National Health and Medical Research Council, the National Mental Health Commission, the Victorian Department of Health, the Victorian Department of Education and Training, the Teacher's Health Foundation, the State Trustees Australia Foundation, the Commonwealth Department of Veterans Affairs, and the Defence Health Foundation. SC has not knowingly received funding from the gambling industry or any industry sponsored organization. He has participated in scholarly and policy related conferences and events which were sponsored by industry, but received no payment for involvement or expenses. MD has received funding for gambling research from the Australian Research Council Discovery Grant Scheme, the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation Grants Scheme, and Healthway WA.	
39 Pitt, H. et al.	2016	Initiation, influence, and impact: adolescents and parents discuss the marketing of gambling products during Australian sporting matches	No CoI declared Individual author funding: HP receives a PhD scholarship as part of an Australian Research Council Discovery Grant on Sports Wagering [DP140102210].	Declared Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation Grants for Gambling Research Program.
40 Pitt, H. et al.	2017	Factors that influence children's gambling attitudes and consumption intentions: lessons for gambling harm prevention research, policies and advocacy strategies	No CoI declared	Declared Australian Research Council Discovery Grant on Sports Wagering [DP140102210].
41 Pitt, H. et al.	2021	How Do People With Intellectual Disability Engage With and Understand Gambling? A Qualitative Study of Adults in Victoria, Australia	CoI declared: HP has received funding from the Australian Research Council, the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, and New South Office of Responsible Gambling. ST has received funding for gambling research from the Australian Research Council New South Wales Office of Responsible Gambling, and Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation. She has received travel funding for gambling presentations from the European Union, Beat the Odds Wales, ACT Gaming and Racing, Royal College of Psychiatrists Wales, SNSUS (Stiftelsen Nordiska Sällskapet för Upplysning om Spelberoende), the Nordic Society Foundation for Information about Problem Gambling. JW has received funding from the Victorian Advocacy League for Individuals with Disability, and the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation. SB has received funding from the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation and the Australian Research Council.	Declared Disability, Inclusion, and Advocacy Research Group at Deakin University.
42 Price, A. et al.	2021	Charting a path towards a public health approach for gambling harm prevention	No CoI reported	Undeclared
43 Raybould, J. N. et al.	2021	Is there a health inequality in gambling related harms? A systematic review	No CoI reported	Declared
44 Reith, G	2007	Gambling and the Contradictions of Consumption: A Genealogy of the "Pathological" Subject	Undeclared	Aston University through a studentship for JR. Undeclared
45 Reith, G. and F. Dobbie	2013	Gambling careers: A longitudinal, qualitative study of gambling behaviour	No CoI declared	Declared Economic and Social Research Council and the Responsibility in Gambling Trust/Responsibility in Gambling Fund (Ref No ESRC RES 164-5 and Ref No ESRC 191 25 0003).
46 Rosecrance, J	1986	Why Regular Gamblers Don't Quit: A Sociological Perspective	Undeclared	Undeclared

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Table 1 (continued)

Author	Date	Title	Author Col ¹	Funding ²
47 Rowlatt, V. et al.	2023	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Gamblers of East Asian Descent in Australia: A Comprehensive Review of Current Evidence	No CoI declared	Declared Queensland University of Technology Centre for Data Science.
48 Schull, N. D	2002	Escape Mechanism: Women, Caretaking, and Compulsive Machine Gambling	Undeclared	Undeclared
49 Waitt, G. et al.	2023	Towards relational geographies of gambling harm: Orientation, affective atmosphere, and intimacy	No CoI declared	Declared Australian Research Council (ARC DP190101405).
50 Waller, S. N. and V. A. Martin	2016	Research note: religious doctrine and its influence on the choice to gamble as a leisure pastime among African American Methodists	No CoI declared	Undeclared
51 Wardle, H.	2018	Perceptions, people and place: Findings from a rapid review of qualitative research on youth gambling	CoI declared Heather Wardle is the Deputy Chair of the Responsible Gambling Strategy Board (RGSB), an independent group that provides advice on gambling policy and research to government. She is remunerated for this position through government by the Gambling Commission (the industry regulator). In her previous employment, she worked on contracts funded by GambleAware, a national charity mandated by government to commission research into gambling in Great Britain. Funds for GambleAware are raised by contributions from the industry, though decisions about what research to fund are made by the RGSB. Heather runs a research consultancy, Heather Wardle Research Ltd. She does not and has not provided consultancy services for industry	Declared Wellcome, United Kingdom, grant number: 200306/Z/15/Z.
52 Wardle, H. et al.	2019	What do we know about gambling-related harm affecting migrants and migrant communities? A rapid review	CoI declared Heather Wardle is the Deputy Chair of the Responsible Gambling Strategy Board (RGSB), an independent group that provides advice on gambling policy and research to government. She is remunerated for this position through government by the Gambling Commission (the industry regulator). In her previous employment, she worked on contracts funded by GambleAware (up to 2016), a national charity mandated by government to commission research into gambling in Great Britain. Funds for GambleAware are raised by contributions from the industry, though decisions about what research to fund are made by the RGSB. Heather runs a research consultancy, Heather Wardle Research Ltd. She does not and has not provided consultancy services for industry. Stephanie Bramley, Caroline Norrie and Jill Manthorpe have received funding from Ridgeway Information Ltd. in the last three years.	Declared King's College London and London School of Tropical Hygiene and Medicine Interdisciplinary Research Fund.
53 Wardle, H. et al.	2014	Risky Places?: Mapping Gambling Machine Density and Socio-Economic Deprivation	CoI declared Heather Wardle and NatCen has received funding for a number of research projects from the Responsible Gambling Fund, a charitable body who funds its research programme based on donations from the gambling industry. NatCen has also undertaken work for an online gambling company to help them improve their social responsibility practice. Ruth Keily and Gaynor Astbury have received funding from the Responsible Gambling Fund as well as other commercial clients not related to the gambling industry. Gerda Reith has received joint funding from the Responsible Gambling Fund and the ESRC. She is also a member of the Responsible Gambling Strategy Board which advises the Responsible Gambling Fund about research issues.	Declared Responsible Gambling Fund.

place as sites for intervention to reduce inequalities in harm. The scale and boundaries of such spaces differ according to localised gambling practices and patterns of gambling harm that may only be detected through diverse forms of local knowledge. This paper provides support for a focus on people's experiences and the spaces, places and contexts in which they are situated when explaining unequal gambling harms (Pyle, 2017). It contributes to wider calls to move away from a focus on individuals with fixed characteristics to a more dynamic and context-dependent understanding of gambling harms (e.g. Reith and Dobbie, 2013). Vulnerabilities to gambling harm are created - not given - and affective atmospheres and decreased collective control play important roles in their creation. It is inadequate to limit 'vulnerable' people's exposure to gambling, rather, we need to consider the integrated processes through which opportunities for the creation of harms are continually created. This involves recognising that everyone can be made vulnerable to harm at certain time points and in certain contexts.

Rather than targeting interventions at people who might be vulnerable based on how we categorise them (e.g. socio-economic status), public health practice could be strengthened by exploring the meanings of gambling in particular places - how people engage with the atmospheres that are being purposely manipulated. In the context of a health needs assessment, this might involve using insight from people's lived experience and drawing on data from similar contexts. Such an approach provides a framework to support assessment of 'place risk' in the application for gambling licenses: building the case that harm may be incremental and that vulnerability may be invisible (see for example Sheffield Magistrates Court, 2024). This builds on Adeniyi et al.'s suggestion (2023, no pagination) that, akin to the strategies of industry to understand consumer variation within places, policymakers should recognise that "approaches to tackle the proliferation of gambling should be tailored to reflect observed local patterns".

Reflecting calls for research into gambling harms that moves away from individual responsibility and behaviour, our framework provides a different starting point for analysis of gambling harms. The tendency of public health practice to be based primarily on statistics that illustrate outcomes on the basis of individual characteristics can lead to explanations that focus on apparently discrete and proximate causes (McMahon, 2023). By focusing on place as a socio-material assemblage, we were able to explore the relational structures that disempower some people and enable greater harms to develop from gambling. The findings therefore point to empowerment of communities of place as an important area for intervention. Public health scholars can support those who influence measures to prevent gambling harms (such as Directors of Public Health in the UK) by using research evidence to challenge dominant narratives. This research gives new language to speak about unequal gambling harms.

6. Strengths and limitations

Our framework for understanding inequalities in place-based gambling harms reflects perspectives and experiences from a range of social science and public health disciplines, integrating disparate forms of knowledge. While the framework reflects perspectives and experiences from several countries, it is limited to high-income countries with established gambling markets. We recognise that differences in regulation exist across high-income countries (Baxter et al., 2019). A strength of the framework is its potential applicability to local practice as it reflects English stakeholder interpretations. Conflicts of interest and funding declarations have been recorded for included papers (Table 1). However, this review does not examine how conflicts of interest may have shaped explanations. While no papers reported funding from the gambling industry, some authors had received funding from voluntary and community sector organisations which are funded by the gambling

industry. Other papers, marked 'undeclared', did not state whether authors had conflicts of interest or how the research was funded, so the role of the gambling industry is unclear in these studies. The review does not examine the strength of the evidence for different theories.

7. Conclusion

This paper presents a synthesis of theories and explanations in the sociological, geographical and public health literature for unequal harms from gambling experienced between places. A socio-material approach to synthesis shows how different assemblages of gambling products, venues, marketing materials and place-based histories influence gambling practices with varying consequences for health. The paper foregrounds how different levels of power and influence in the production, regulation and experience of space across place-based communities shape i) the meanings of gambling as a social practice and ii) the collective resources of communities to protect themselves from gambling harms. The analysis has pointed to socio-material spaces as sites for interventions to reduce inequalities in harm.

Funding

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CRediT authorship contribution statement

Katie Powell: Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Methodology, Project administration, Writing – original draft. **Laura Fenton:** Data curation, Formal analysis, Methodology, Writing – original draft. **Elizabeth McGill:** Data curation, Formal analysis, Writing – review & editing. **Saima Nazir-Desforges:** Data curation, Writing – original draft. **Mark Clowes:** Data curation, Methodology, Writing – original draft. **Abigail Kate Stevely:** Formal analysis, Writing – review & editing. **Cheryl McQuire:** Writing – review & editing. **Paige M. Hulls:** Writing – review & editing. **Zoe L. Clarke:** Data curation, Writing – review & editing. **Michael P. Daly:** Writing – review & editing. **Matt Egan:** Data curation, Funding acquisition, Methodology, Writing – review & editing. **Frank de Vocht:** Funding acquisition, Writing – review & editing.

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Data availability

No data was used for the research described in the article.

References

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