

A critical discussion of gambling addiction and the effects on police officers

Exploring gambling addiction among police officers, the stigma, support accessibility, how it affects their role, wellbeing, professional integrity and willingness to seek help.

Key details

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Research context

Gambling addiction within law enforcement is a rarely explored phenomenon, despite growing recognition of the disorder's impact on mental health, integrity and workplace functioning.

Police officers operate under intense psychological pressure, and the risk of developing detrimental coping mechanisms such as gambling is heightened by exposure to trauma, shift work and cultural norms that often discourage vulnerability.

This dissertation focuses on the stigma associated with gambling addiction among serving police officers in the UK, the support systems theoretically available to them, and the likelihood of those systems being accessed in practice. Stigma not only impedes help-seeking but can also isolate officers further, exacerbating mental health decline and reducing professional effectiveness.

Confidentiality concerns and fear of reputational damage may discourage officers from accessing services such as Gamblers Anonymous, especially in smaller communities or tight-knit forces.

Existing literature largely overlooks the occupational-specific consequences of gambling addiction, such as compromised integrity, impaired judgment, reduced concentration and familial disruption. Moreover, current addiction support structures are not tailored to address the nuanced needs of law enforcement professionals, who may require discreet and trauma-informed interventions.

By drawing from criminology, occupational psychology and addiction studies, this research aims to fill a critical gap in the literature and encourage conversations around vulnerability, wellness and stigma in policing. The findings may help inform future policy and support pathways within law enforcement institutions, providing more effective routes to intervention and recovery.

Research methodology

This dissertation employs a qualitative, desk-based methodology, relying solely on secondary sources to explore the stigma surrounding gambling addiction among police officers, the accessibility of support services and the behavioural impact of addiction within law enforcement roles.

Due to time constraints and limited access to participants and relevant data, primary research was not feasible for this project. Instead, a thematic content analysis of existing literature, including academic articles, policy documents, government publications and third-sector reports will be conducted. Sources span disciplines such as criminology, occupational health, addiction studies and psychology, offering a multifaceted view of how gambling addiction is perceived and managed in policing contexts.

Special emphasis is placed on the barriers to help-seeking, particularly how stigma and confidentiality concerns may prevent officers from accessing traditional support channels. Literature from organisations such as Gamblers Anonymous, Public Health England and police federations provides insight into current support infrastructure and its limitations.

The research aims to identify gaps in both knowledge and practice, forming a foundation for future investigation. While this dissertation does not include empirical findings, the insights developed here will support the design of future primary research, to examine officer experiences directly and explore institutional attitudes towards gambling-related vulnerabilities.

This approach allows for a critical and reflective study of an under-researched issue while remaining sensitive to ethical and practical boundaries.