

Playing Social Roulette: The impact of gambling on individuals and society in Ireland

Dr Crystal Fulton

School of Information & Communication Studies



ACADEMIC



POLITICAL



SOCIAL

SUMMARY

Harmful gambling can devastate individuals and their families, both financially and socially. Dr Crystal Fulton's first national study of the social impact of problem gambling in Ireland has helped to drive the conversation around this issue which negatively impacts between 224,000 and 440,000 people.

The Department of Justice and Equality is using the research to inform new regulations around gambling. It is also used by service providers (Rutland Centre, 2016) and others to help those affected by addiction.

The study was directly connected to current legislative work around identifying “developments in the area of gambling, inclusive of all aspects of gambling such as technological innovation and international legislation, and, to identify new or emerging legislative and policy issues in the area of gambling not currently represented in the original General Scheme”

RESEARCH

Harmful gambling is a costly social issue, affecting addicted individuals, families, and wider communities. Addressing this problem is a priority for the Departments of Justice and Equality and Social Protection, and a range of individuals and service providers in Ireland.

Dr Crystal Fulton's national study was designed to provide foundational information for policy and legislative development in Ireland. The research began with a two-year exploration of the social impact of harmful gambling, involving in-depth interviews with critical stakeholders: addiction counsellors; recovering gamblers; and gamblers' social connections; as well as a focus group with gambling industry representatives.

A follow-up study in 2016 examined international trends in the literature about gambling and consulted with stakeholders about potential changes to legislation.

Participants specifically identified updated legislation, educational initiatives, and open discussion about harmful gambling as the critical requirements for addressing harmful gambling in Ireland.



Because of this research, the highly stigmatised problem of gambling addiction has moved from the shadows into the social and political conversation. This research has been directly applied to the content of new legislation in Ireland, with the Private Member's Bill, the Gambling Control Bill 2018, which reached Stage Two. Additionally, local (e.g. addiction counsellors, researchers), national (e.g. government), and international (e.g. EU) groups are leveraging the research to increase awareness and to develop services to assist people affected by gambling.

RESEARCH IMPACT

Dr Crystal Fulton has provided the first national study of social impact of harmful gambling in Ireland. This “pioneering” (DSP, 2015) research has been praised by the UK Gambling Commission and Responsible Gambling Strategy Board for uniquely “measuring harm,” rather than “simply counting” problem gamblers, as done in most jurisdictions (Email correspondence, UKGC, 2015).

An Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection, Joan Burton – who launched the initial report findings – said of the project, an “alarming finding that the study highlights is the connection between problem gambling and people at a young age.” This project revealed the plight of the gambler and their families and the need for updated legislation, planned services, and open discussion to dispel the stigma around this addiction in Ireland.

Barry Grant (2017), CEO of Problem Gambling Ireland, said the research “has helped to drive the conversation regarding an issue which negatively impacts between 224,000 and 440,000 people in Ireland.”

Significantly, the Department of Justice and Equality funded and used a follow-up investigation, Developments in the Gambling Area (2017), not only as a driver for legislative change, but also as content for new regulations around gambling (Finn, 2018; Rogan, 2018a), with Minister Stanton noting that, “the bill would also take into account a [UCD] report commissioned by the department last year” (Rogan, 2018b).

Minister for Justice and Equality Stanton launched the second report on their website, noting “The report forms part of a general review process of the regulation of the gambling sector in Ireland, with a view to early legislative action.”

The research featured in Parliamentary Questions in the Oireachtas, where Minister Stanton said the study was directly connected to current legislative work around identifying “developments in the area of gambling, inclusive of all aspects of gambling such as technological innovation and international legislation, and, to identify new or emerging legislative and policy issues in the area of gambling not currently represented in the original General Scheme and which may need to be addressed in new legislation.”

Most recently, the Gambling Control Bill 2018, was introduced and entered Stage Two of review. The research has also captured attention at EU level, e.g., inclusion in an EU-hosted conference to promote legislative change to control gambling (Fulton, 2017).

With two ministerial launches and wide, ongoing press coverage, the results of the project also continue to have broad social impact – including informing children’s programming with footballer Niall McNamee and the Gaelic Players Association to address gambling problems in sports (Email correspondence, McNamee, 2015), and counselling services for those affected by harmful gambling (Rutland Centre, 2016).

A joint submission to government by Problem Gambling Ireland, the Rutland Centre, and the Union of Students drew heavily from Fulton’s first study of gambling impact, citing/supporting Fulton’s research recommendations (Grant, et al., 2017).

RESEARCH REFERENCES

Current Legislative Progress

Gambling Control Bill 2018. First Stage (passed, February 21, 2018). Dáil Éireann Debates. Vol. 965 No. 8. p. 18. [oireachtas-debates.oireachtas.ie/debates%20authoring/debateswebpage.nsf/takes/dail2018022100018](https://www.oireachtas.ie/debates/authoring/debateswebpage.nsf/takes/dail2018022100018)

Official Study Launches

Launch of Playing Social Roulette by An Tanaiste (July 15, 2015), Dublin: [ucd.ie/news/2015/07/JUL15/160715-Tanaiste-launches-pioneering-UCD-study-on-the-social-impact-of-gambling-in-Ireland.html](https://www.ucd.ie/news/2015/07/JUL15/160715-Tanaiste-launches-pioneering-UCD-study-on-the-social-impact-of-gambling-in-Ireland.html)

Launch of Developments in the Gambling Area by Minister Stanton, Department of Justice and Equality (February 23, 2017), Dublin: [stanton.ie/2017/02/23/minister-stanton-publishes-report-on-gambling/](https://www.stanton.ie/2017/02/23/minister-stanton-publishes-report-on-gambling/)

Conference Presentations

Fulton, C. (2017). Playing Social Roulette. Ireland Remove the Blinkers: We Need to Talk About Gambling. EU conference, Dublin. European Parliamentary Group, European Commission.

Fulton, C. (2015). Playing Social Roulette: The Impact of Gambling on Individuals and Society in Ireland – Phase 1: Mapping Service Provision for Gambling Addiction in Ireland, Conference Poster, New Horizons Responsible Gambling Conference, Vancouver, BC, Canada. Abstract published: <https://tinyurl.com/yc5y5uom>

Reports

Fulton, C. (2017). Developments in the Gambling Area: Emerging trends and issues supporting the development of policy and legislation in Ireland. Department of Justice and Equality, Ireland: [justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/PB17000062](https://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/PB17000062)



Fulton, C. (2015). Playing Social Roulette: The Impact of Gambling on Individuals and Society in Ireland. UCD: researchrepository.ucd.ie/handle/10197/6796 (among overall top three downloads for the School of Information & Communication Studies). Also welfare.ie/en/pressoffice/pdf/Playing-Social-Roulette.pdf (website of Department of Social Protection).

Articles

Fulton, C. (November 1, 2017). More than just financial loss, the social impact of gambling cannot be underestimated. The Conversation: tinyurl.com/y8gvn3qo

Fulton, C. (November 8, 2018). No sure bet: dealing with the effects of harmful gambling. RTE Brainstorm. <https://www.rte.ie/eile/brainstorm/2018/1107/1009287-no-sure-bet-dealing-with-the-effects-of-harmful-gambling/>

Fulton, C. (In press). Secrets and secretive behaviours: Exploring the hidden through harmful gambling. Library and Information Science Research, 41(2).

Government Press Releases

Fulton, C. (Forthcoming). The information needs of individuals affected by harmful gambling in Ireland. International Journal of Information, Diversity, and Inclusion

Department of Justice and Equality (February 23, 2017). Report on gambling by Minister Stanton: stanton.ie/2017/02/23/minister-stanton-publishes-report-on-gambling.

Department of Social Protection (July 15, 2015). Study on the social impact of gambling from office of an Tánaiste: welfare.ie/en/pressoffice/Pages/pr150715.aspx. Also: ucd.ie/news/2015/07JUL15/160715-Tanaiste-launches-pioneering-UCD-study-on-the-social-impact-of-gambling-in-Ireland.html

National Media Coverage

Multiple Irish newspaper articles including The Irish Times: [irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/gambling-addiction-may-start-as-early-as-nine-years-old-study-suggests-1.2286003](https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/gambling-addiction-may-start-as-early-as-nine-years-old-study-suggests-1.2286003); and the Independent: [independent.ie/irish-news/study-40000-in-ireland-known-to-have-a-gambling-problem-31378896.html](https://www.independent.ie/irish-news/study-40000-in-ireland-known-to-have-a-gambling-problem-31378896.html).

Wide radio and television coverage, including high profile, national programmes such as the Claire Byrne Show, Primetime, RTE News, and Pat Kenny.

Additional citations

Email correspondence with sports personality and spokesperson on gambling addiction Niall McNamee (September 3, 2015).

Email correspondence with UK Gambling Commission (July 20, 2015).

Finn, C. (2018 Jan 10). Casinos, gaming machines and online gambling to be overseen by independent regulator. Journal.ie.

Fulton, C. (April 17, 2019). Presentation to the Joint Committee on Justice and Equality. Leinster House, Dublin, Ireland.

Grant, B. (April 27, 2017). Statement of support for research impact from CEO of Problem Gambling and addiction counsellor.

Grant, B, Leahy, M., & Power, C. (2016). Gambling Control Bill - Joint Submission. http://www.problemgambling.ie/uploads/9/0/0/2/9002949/gambling_control_bill_-_detailed_joint_submission.pdf

Parliamentary Questions, Oireachtas. (March 7, 2017). Questions 108, 109, 110, 111, by Deputy Anne Rabbitte, and response by Deputy David Stanton. <http://www.inis.gov.ie/en/JELR/Pages/PQ-07-03-2017-111>

Rogan, A. (2018a Jan 11). Government to tighten regulatory reins on gambling companies. The Times: [thetimes.co.uk/edition/ireland/government-to-tighten-regulatory-reins-on-gambling-companies-572kx06xc](https://www.thetimes.co.uk/edition/ireland/government-to-tighten-regulatory-reins-on-gambling-companies-572kx06xc)

Rogan, A. (2018b Jan 15). Gambling firms face levy to pay for addiction treatment. The Times: [thetimes.co.uk/edition/ireland/gambling-firms-face-levy-to-pay-for-addiction-treatment-gkjjw3k66](https://www.thetimes.co.uk/edition/ireland/gambling-firms-face-levy-to-pay-for-addiction-treatment-gkjjw3k66)

Rutland Centre: rutlandcentre.ie/what-we-treat/gambling

Email correspondence with EU Employment Committee member Lynn Boylan, MEP. (Wednesday, April 26, 2017).

Funding & Support

Irish Research Council Funding (2013-2015), €45,473.75. The first research study, presented in Playing Social Roulette, was funded by the Irish Research Council's Government of Ireland Research Project Grants Scheme in conjunction with the Department of Social Protection Research Innovation Awards (DSPRIA). This study has featured as a research highlight via the IRC's website, and via the Department of Social Protection's website: welfare.ie/en/pressoffice/Pages/pr150715.aspx.

Department of Justice and Equality (2016), €10,898.99. Follow up study, Developments in the Gambling Area: Emerging trends and issues supporting the development of policy and legislation in Ireland. This piece is being used to help Irish legislators revise the existing outdated gambling legislation from the 1950s.

College of Social Science & Law (CoSSL) Research Funding (2016-2017) €1,994.00.