

# HOW DO INDUSTRY-FUNDED ALCOHOL AND GAMBLING CONFERENCES FRAME THE ISSUES? AN ANALYSIS OF CONFERENCE AGENDAS

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** There is a growing evidence base that unhealthy commodity industries (including alcohol and gambling) promote industry favourable framings of product harms and solutions. These framings adopt a focus on the individual while overlooking broader influences and solutions. One potential method to influence the framing of harms and solutions is funding and organising conferences. This study aims to examine how industry-funded alcohol and gambling conferences present themselves and frame product harms and solutions.

**Methods:** We conducted a descriptive examination and framing analysis of industry-funded alcohol and gambling conference descriptions and agendas or programmes to examine how conferences were presented and how the included topics framed the issues of product harm and solutions. A hybrid approach (using both deductive and inductive coding) was used for framing analysis, informed by previous research.

**Results:** All the included conferences were targeted at professionals outside of the respective industry, many specifically mentioning researchers or policy makers. Several of the conferences offered professional credits for attendance. We identified four key frames which are consistent with the existing evidence base: a complex link between product consumption and harm, focus on the individual, deflection from population-level approaches and medicalisation/specialisation of solutions.

**Conclusions:** We found industry-favourable framings of harms and solutions within the alcohol and gambling conferences included in our sample. These conferences are aimed at professionals outside of industry, including researchers and policy makers, with several offering professional credits for attendance. Greater awareness of the potential for industry favourable framings at conference settings is required.

## INTRODUCTION

Framing is “what we emphasise, how we explain an issue, and what we leave unsaid” (The Health Foundation, 2022). How issues are framed influences how they are understood and addressed by researchers, professionals and the wider public. Framing strategies influence how negative health impacts related to commercial activities are viewed.

Existing qualitative analysis of unhealthy commodity industry (UCI) materials, including alcohol and gambling industries, has shown a preference for framing product harms and solutions in ways favourable to business interests (Cowlshaw & Thomas, 2018; Knai et al., 2021; Livingstone, 2018; Casswell, 2013; van Schalkwyk et al., 2021). Understanding the extent to which different unhealthy commodity industries may use similar framing strategies (Knai et al., 2021; Petticrew et al., 2017) is useful in understanding the wider, cumulative effects on policy and understanding. Favourable framings often promote harms associated with products as predominantly an issue of individual responsibility; for example, using the rhetoric of ‘responsible’ or ‘moderate’ drinking (Petticrew, et al., 2017) and ‘responsible gambling’ (Petticrew, et al., 2017; Livingstone, 2018; Adams, 2016).

In keeping with this framing, alcohol industry actors focus on solutions that emphasise individual responsibility such as education and awareness campaigns (Knai, et al., 2021; Maani Hessari & Petticrew, 2018) and advocate against increasing price and reducing availability which are more effective and cost-effective for reducing alcohol (Babor, 2009; McCambridge, et al. 2014) harms. There is evidence that these framings of individual responsibility in gambling are reinforced by health professionals (Alexius 2017), industry funded campaigns (van Schalkwyk et al, 2021) and youth education programmes (van

Schalkwyk et al, 2022). Amongst the UKs public, the prevalent narrative is that health is predominantly a matter of individual choices (The Health Foundation, 2022).

Focusing on individual choices, neglects the wider determinants of health, including the ‘social determinants of health’, of which commercial determinants are a key component. The World Health Organisation has defined commercial determinants of health as “private sector activities that affect people’s health positively or negatively” (World Health Organisation, n.d.). The actions of industries have wider implications beyond direct consumption of the products. They can shape the environmental and policy landscape in which we all live. There needs to be a shift in focus away from a narrative of individual responsibility to acknowledging that commercial actors impact upon health (Maani et al, 2022). The focus on individual choices deflects from the inherently harmful nature of the products, pricing, and marketing strategies (Babor, 2009; Maani Hessari & Petticrew, 2018). Harms related to both alcohol (Bellis, et al., 2016) and gambling (Raybould, et al., 2021) disproportionately affect those from more deprived backgrounds and adopting solely individual solutions is also more likely to widen these inequalities (Lorenc, et al., 2013).

Funding or organising scientific conferences can allow industries to involve themselves in science (Babor, 2009; Maani Hessari & Petticrew, 2018; Livingstone & Adams, 2016) which can influence the framings of harms related to product consumption (Livingstone, 2018; Babor, 2009; Mart, 2012). Even if industry bodies don’t have direct input into conference agendas, they can provide more resources and sustainability for specific conferences over others, thereby shaping the overall research landscape.

Additionally, there may be indirect opportunity for influence “through the sponsorship of hospitality hours where free alcohol is provided, the renting of exhibit space... where free publications are distributed...”. (Babor, 2009, p. 42). These setting can provide useful opportunity for relationship building between industry actors, researchers, or other professionals (Adams, 2016; Mart, 2012). Livingstone & Adams (2016) describe “networking events, often styled as academic conferences, [which] are often routinely industry-sponsored and dominated, sometimes with industry input into the programmes and industry venues”.

While it is known that UCIs fund conferences, there is limited research analysing how industry-favoured framings are echoed in industry-funded conferences. This study aims to identify and compare alcohol and gambling-themed conferences that receive funding from their respective industries and to analyse:

- 1) the characteristics of the conferences (e.g., target audience, hospitality sessions); and
- 2) how gambling and alcohol harms are framed within conference agenda, what solutions are presented and the extent to which these framings are supportive of industry interests and their wider corporate strategies.

## **METHODS**

### **Theory**

Framing strategies influence how a given issue is interpreted, providing a framework or ‘roadmap’ for how to conceptualise and process an issue (Goffman, 1974). Framing analysis has been used to examine how unhealthy commodity industries act to shape this narrative (Rinaldi et al, 2020; van Schalkwyk et al, 2021).

### **Data collection**

Alcohol and gambling conferences were identified by 1) academic researchers with expertise in alcohol and gambling research; 2) searching for conferences funded by organisations identified in key pieces of literature (Babor, 2009; Petticrew, et al., 2017); and 3) conducting Google searches using the terms ‘alcohol and health conference’ and ‘gambling and health conference’.

Individual alcohol and gambling conferences and their associated materials were included for analysis if:

- 1) the conference agenda concerned health impacts of product consumption.
- 2) was ‘industry-funded’.
- 3) the conference occurred between 2016 and 2021 (or scheduled to occur in 2021 with full agenda available).
- 4) had a complete agenda with all titles of sessions available online and in English; and
- 5) clearly specified the target audience.

For this study, we designated a conference as ‘industry-funded’ if it received direct sponsorship from an unhealthy commodity producer or provider or support from industry-funded third-party organisations. We took screenshots of the financial support from the conference websites.

We identified a sample of third-party organisations from two key pieces of literature (Babor, 2009; Petticrew, et al., 2017), via academics working in the field or via the organisational website declaring industry support and funding. If there was insufficient information to conclude that a conference had received industry support, we did not include it.

The final criterion was applied to ensure that the included conferences were aimed at professionals outside of the alcohol and gambling industry. Data were extracted on conference name, organiser, target audience, year and country, venue, agenda, hospitality/social events, professional credits for attendance, and any industry funding, either directly or via third-party organisations.

### Analysis

Analysis comprised two stages: (1) descriptive examination to understand how each conference was presented (for example, as an academic conference or networking opportunity), and (2) framing analysis of the conference content as presented in the agenda or programmes.



### Framing analysis

We used a hybrid approach, including both deductive and inductive coding, consistent with methodologies applied in previous analyses of conference and alcohol-industry materials (Pettigrew, et al., 2018; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Xu & Zammit, 2020). The Braun and Clarke (Braun & Clarke, 2020; Braun & Clarke, 2006) approach to thematic analysis also informed coding of the data. Conference agendas and programs were read several times to become familiar with the content. Then, all titles for the sessions (including presentations and workshops) were coded. First, a deductive approach was taken with initial codes informed by research into a systems approach to studying unhealthy commodity industries (Knai, et al., 2021, p. 5): namely, 1. “focus on youth”, 2. “focus on the individual”, 3. “Being ‘part of the solution’” and 4. “Focus on ‘sustainability’ and strategic use of CSR”. A subset of conferences was used to build upon these codes and develop an initial framework with 12 parent codes included. This initial coding framework was then applied to the entire dataset. During this process, an inductive approach was used, allowing additional codes to emerge from the data.

Similar codes were combined, and higher-order codes generated based on groupings. This process was performed separately for alcohol and gambling conference data until sub-themes and themes were created. Comparisons of generated sub-themes and themes between alcohol and gambling industry-funded conferences were then reflected upon and named. Finally, overarching framing strategies were identified informed by the existing evidence on industry strategies. Data analysis was supported using NVivo 12 (QSR International Pty Ltd, 2018). One (KDC) author completed the coding process, with a second author (NM) reviewing the coding.

## RESULTS

The sample included nine alcohol and 11 gambling conferences (See Tables 1 & 2). We didn't include some conferences with links to industry (e.g., Drinkaware annual conferences) due to insufficient publicly available conference materials. A total of 65 documents were included, most of which were conference agendas or programmes.

*Table 1: Included Alcohol Conferences*

Organiser	Title of conference	Year	Country	Professional credits offered	Why included
<b>Alcohol Education Trust</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> National Alcohol and Drugs Conference	2016	UK	No	Alcohol Education Trust identified as receiving industry funding (Golder et al, 2020, van Schalkwyk et al 2021).
	2 <sup>nd</sup> National Alcohol and Drugs Education Conference	2018	UK	Yes – Continuing professional development (CPD)	
	3 <sup>rd</sup> National conference on alcohol and drugs	2020	UK	No	
<b>Gordon Research Conferences</b>	Gordon Research Conference - <i>Alcohol and the Nervous System</i>	2018	USA	Yes– via eMedEvents	Receives funding from ABMRF/The Foundation for Alcohol Research and Research Society on Alcoholism. (Babor, 2009)
	Gordon Research Conference - <i>Alcohol Induced End Organ Diseases</i>	2019	USA	Yes– via eMedEvents	
	Gordon Research Conference - <i>Alcohol and the Nervous System</i>	2020	USA	Yes– via eMedEvents	Receives funding from ABMRF/The Foundation for Alcohol Research and Research Society on Alcoholism (Babor, 2009).  Sponsorship from Distilled Spirits Council of the United States (Gordon Research Council, 2020)

<b>International Wine and Heart Health Summits and WineHealth</b>	International Wine and Health Summit	2019	USA	Yes- professional credits from American Academy of Family Physicians.	Sponsorship from Renaud Society and Desert Heart Foundation - identified in the literature as receiving funding from alcohol industry (Adams, 2016)
<b>Research Society on Alcoholism</b>	Research Society on Alcoholism 42nd Annual Scientific Meeting	2019	USA	Yes – via eMedEvents	Sponsorship from Distilled Spirits Council of the United States
<b>OIV (international Organisation of Vine and Wine)</b>	Wine and Health	2017	Spain	No	Receives direct sponsorship from wine producers and ‘Wine in moderation’ which includes alcohol industry professionals on the board. (Wine in Moderation, n.d.)

*Table 2: Included Gambling Conferences*

<b>Organiser</b>	<b>Title of conference</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Professional credits offered</b>	<b>Why included</b>
<b>British Columbia Lottery Corporation (BCLC)</b>	New Horizons in Responsible Gambling Conference	2019	Canada	No	British Columbia Lottery Corporation hosts the conference
	New Horizons in Responsible Gambling Conference	2020	Canada	No	
	New Horizons in Responsible Gambling Conference	2021	Canada	No	
<b>European Association for the Study of Gambling (EASG)</b>	12th European Conference on Gambling Studies and Policy Issues	2018	Malta	No	Directly sponsored by industry bodies e.g., Holland Casino. (The European Association for the Study of Gambling, 2018)
<b>GambleAware</b>	GambleAware 5 <sup>th</sup> Harm Minimisation Conference	2017	UK	No	Industry funding identified via literature (Cowlshaw & Thomas, 2018; Petticrew, et al., 2017; Livingstone, 2018)
	GambleAware 6 <sup>th</sup> Harm Minimisation Conference	2018	UK	No	
	GambleAware 7 <sup>th</sup> Harm Minimisation Conference	2019	UK	No	
<b>International Gaming Institute</b>	17th International Conference on Gambling and Risk-Taking	2019	USA	Yes – continuing education credits (approved by the National Council of Problem Gambling) & continuing legal education credits.	Identified in the literature (Livingstone, 2018) and directly sponsored by industry bodies e.g., Caesars Entertainment. (International

					Gaming Institute, 2019)
<b>International Centre for Responsible Gaming (ICRG)</b>	21st ICRG Conference on Gambling and Addiction	2020	USA	Yes- Continuing education credits.	ICRG receives funding from the gambling industry. (International Centre for Responsible Gaming (ICRG), n.d.)
<b>National Council on Problem Gambling</b>	34th National Conference on Gambling and Addiction	2020	USA	Yes- Continuing education credits.	Directly sponsored by industry bodies (National Council on Problem Gambling (NCPG), 2020).
<b>Victoria Responsible Gambling Foundation</b>	Gambling Harm Conference	2018	Australia	No	Victorian responsible gambling foundation partners with gambling industry. (Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation)

## Descriptive analysis results

### *Stated target audience for the conferences*

All conferences were aimed at professionals from outside of the respective industry. Three of the alcohol conferences (all provided by Alcohol Education Trust) specifically mentioned ‘public health professionals’ amongst their target audience. One explicitly mentioned ‘policy makers’, six mentioned ‘researchers’ or ‘research community’.

Two of the conferences mentioned delegates from the alcohol industry amongst their target audience. Of the 11 gambling conferences, eight mentioned the gambling industry amongst their target audience alongside academic researchers and policymakers. One mentioned public health professionals, three mentioned ‘policy makers’ and six referred to researchers.

### *Professional credits for conference attendance*

Awarding professional credits for attendance at a conference suggests that it includes training or learning of a high standard, adds an element of legitimacy to what is being presented at the conference and may provide an incentive for individuals to attend. Four of the alcohol conferences and three of the 11 gambling conferences offered professional credits for attendance (see Tables 1 & 2 for further details).

### *Partnerships, career development and networking*

Amongst the included alcohol conferences, only one explicitly mentioned partnership between alcohol industry and other professionals:

*“The blending of the international research community along with a broad-based clinical physician and healthcare provider attendance, and delegates from the wine industry and advocate groups”* (International Wine & Health, 2019) - conference overview.

The gambling conferences focused on partnerships more so than the alcohol industry-funded conferences. Eight of the included 11 conferences referred to networking and relationship building:

*“This is, after all, a ‘conference of collisions’, and we have tried to organize a program structure that encourages cross-disciplinary and cross-continental conversations”* (17<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Gambling & Risk Taking) - conference schedule.

Some of the included industry-funded conferences appeared to promote their product to attendees. The 2017 Wine and Health conference included a guided visit to a winery with wine tasting. The 2019 International Wine and Health summit included a private reception at the university’s winery, tasting of the University of California Davis wine, and a two-hour tour of the winery and brewery, including *‘Hearty hors d’oeuvres, wine, and merry send-off!’* (International Wine & Health summit, 2019).

## Framing analysis results

We found a total of 17 sub-themes, grouped into four overarching frames, these are presented below, with key examples given to illustrate the points.

### *A complex link between product use and harm*

This frame particularly emphasises the link between product consumption and harm as complex and can be used to suggest that that universal reduction should be discouraged (as some people benefit from ‘moderate’ consumption) or to call for further research before action is taken (because there may be undiscovered mediators or confounders). This framing has been observed in other contexts (Petticrew et al, 2017; Knai et al, 2021) We found reference to the benefit of alcohol consumption in two conferences in our sample:

*“...your appreciation for wine as a medium, in moderation, for better health, enhanced”* (International Wine & Health Summit, 2019) - conference overview.

*“...to better understand the positive and negative consequences of alcohol use”* (Research Society on Alcoholism, 2019) - conference overview.

We identified only one example of reference to the benefit of gambling (entertainment) within the included sample:

*“The Balancing Act: How should we look at product risk vs entertainment”* (8<sup>th</sup> New Horizons in Responsible Gambling)- 2020 Speakers- session title.



Potential mediators or confounders of the relationship between alcohol and gambling products and harm formed part of this overall framing. We found several examples in both the included alcohol and gambling conferences:

*“Implication of the Gut Microbiota in Behavioural Changes Linked to Alcohol Dependence: Mechanistic Approaches and Therapeutic Perspectives”* (Gordon Research Council, 2018) - conference programme-session title.

*“Exploring Testosterone as Emerging Modulator of Risky Choices and Impulsivity in Problem Gambling”* (International Gaming Institute, 2019)- conference programme - session title.

When reflecting on the framing overall, the message could be that more research is needed or that the link is not straightforward, possibly deflecting from wider population-based interventions.

### Focus on the individual

We found framing that individualised the harms associated with alcohol and gambling in all the conferences included in our sample. Behaviours were described as ‘problematic’ (in opposition to ‘responsible’ consumption):

*“The neural circuitry of excessive alcohol drinking and other maladaptive behaviours”* (Gordon Research Council, 2018)- conference programme-session title.

*“Our vision is for young people to enter adulthood having a responsible understanding of alcohol and its short- and long-term effects”* (Alcohol Education Trust, 2018) - conference overview.

Similarly, for gambling conferences, there was a focus on individual responsibility, choice, and ‘problem’ behaviours. We found many references to ‘responsible gambling’ and ‘problem gambling’ as opposed to ‘moderate’ or healthy consumption throughout the sample:

*“Self-control and decision making as limited resources: Implications for healthy gambling choices”* (British Columbia Lottery Corporation (BCLC), 2019)- Session title.

Existing research has found that education is often presented by industry as a solution to supporting personal responsibility (Knai, et al., 2021; Maani Hessari & Petticrew, 2018). The Alcohol Education Trust conferences (2016, 2018 & 2021) exclusively focused on education for young people and children, promoting education about ‘responsible drinking’ in a school-

based setting. Education more broadly was mentioned within the gambling conferences, presented as a solution to individual choices:

*“Using Misconception to Improve Education Programs that Aim to Prevent Gambling Problems”* (International Gaming Institute, 2019) - conference programme- session title.

In comparison, there was little mention of broader harms to families, communities, and services, while solutions with an individual focus, such as education, were promoted. This focus on individual responsibility promotes perspectives and ideas about what is needed to address alcohol and gambling harms in ways favourable to industry because it can allow deflection from regulations aimed at reducing consumption including restricting product design and marketing practices.

#### *Deflecting from population level interventions*

We observed a complimentary framing within the materials, focusing mainly on certain demographic groups, in particular young people, and women, as more vulnerable to harm related to product consumption:

*“Alcohol and Gender: Special consideration for female drinkers”* (International Wine & Health Summit, 2019) – conference agenda-session title.

*“Identifying help-seeking behaviours among women gamblers: a cross-sectional population survey from Quebec, Canada”* (The European

Association for the Study of Gambling, 2018)- conference programme-session title.

We found very few mentions of broader harms associated with alcohol consumption within our sample and no mention of harms to families or to society. The gambling conferences contained some references to the broader harms experienced. However, both industries had minimal discussion of policy or population-level solutions to harms:

*“Understanding the role of gambling and interaction with the social determinants of health for Indigenous Peoples”* (The European Association for the Study of Gambling, 2018)- conference programme.

Focusing on the needs and vulnerabilities of specific populations is an essential part of implementing public health interventions. However, without presentation of whole population approaches, the focus helps to create a framing that harms from the products aren't universal but limited to certain demographic vulnerable groups:

*“... a “one-size-fits-all” approach to responsible gambling is just not optimal”* (British Columbia Lottery Corporation, 2021)- conference agenda.

### Medicalisation or specialisation of solutions

Four of the ten alcohol conferences included pharmacological treatment to reduce alcohol harms. We found this framing could be seen in the way potential drug targets were presented as solutions at the conferences with lack of population-based measures:

*“Is the cuddle drug for real? Exploring oxytocin as a treatment for alcohol use disorder”* (Research Society on Alcoholism, 2019) - conference programme-session title.

*“Pharmacological Treatment of Pathological Gambling with Oxcarbazepine”* (International Gaming Institute, 2019)- conference agenda-session title.

Several gambling conferences included sessions focused on artificial intelligence in relation to individuals’ gambling activity. This framing could suggest that there will be effective methods for reducing gambling harms in the future:

*“Artificial intelligence and its Potential for Responsible Gambling”* (British Columbia Lottery Corporation (BCLC), 2019)- list of speakers 2019- session title.

Although approaches differ, overall, both the alcohol and gambling conferences contained framing of solutions as specialised or medicalised and located the problem and solution as arising from the individual consumer.

## DISCUSSION

Our framing analysis of industry-funded alcohol and gambling conferences found four key frames consistent with the existing evidence base: a complex link between product consumption and harm, focus on the individual, deflection from population level approaches and medicalisation/specialisation of solutions. This analysis focused on topics that were presented overall at the conferences and how these potentially support broader industry-favoured framing strategies. It takes a broad perspective and doesn't examine the individual presenters who may be unaware of this preference for certain framings (Cassidy et al., 2013). Due to our study design, we are unable to establish the temporal relationship and the nature of the funding effect, only that the included conferences promoted industry-favoured framing. It may be that industry funding influences the type of conference and its content, or that established conferences attract industry funding, making them more sustainable with time.

### The conferences

For the included alcohol and gambling industries, conferences were aimed at professionals outside of the industry, with many mentioning researchers or policymakers and some offering professional credits for attendance. Some of the included conferences included hospitality programmes either at casinos or at wineries. Also, some of the included conferences were presented as opportunities to network and build connections between industry workers and policymakers or academics. The career-focused sessions at the gambling conferences often featured both academics and industry speakers, suggesting permeability between these roles and flexibility of working across these communities. This wasn't as overt in the alcohol conference materials analysed. The included alcohol conferences also appeared to have less obvious links to industry, primarily via third party organisations (such as the Foundation for Alcohol Research). This presentation of networking aligns with Mart's (Mart, 2012) and Adams' (Adams, 2016) observations. As Livingstone and Adams say, the gambling

industry “*stressed the importance of collaboration among ‘stakeholders’, thus normalizing industry participation in and control of research programmes and agendas*” (Livingstone & Adams, 2016). Of note, the 2021 GambleAware conference, held after the completion of this analysis, was dedicated to the theme of “Collaboration in the Prevention of Gambling Harms” (GambleAware, 2021). More research is needed to explore how the concept of collaboration is being framed and how this serves to obscure the public health harms that can arise when partnering with industry (Marks, 2019). This complements the extensive literature on the “funding effect” associated with industry funding of and engagement with academic research (Krimsky, 2019).

### **Framing of harms and solutions in conference materials**

The analysis found four dominant framings present at the alcohol and gambling conferences that focus on individual causes and solutions whilst rejecting, minimizing, or ignoring broader society-level interventions such as regulation and policy. These framings can be seen as aligning with broader industry strategies. Framing the causes of harm as complex is a strategy found in existing research into unhealthy commodities (Petticrew, et al., 2017; Maani Hessari & Petticrew, 2018; Lim et al. 2019; Savona et al, 2020). It has been shown previously that unhealthy commodity industries “*may be using the concept of complexity to ... dispute the role of unhealthy commodities in the causation of health problems*” (Petticrew, et al., 2017 p. 1078). The analysis found that complexity framing was also apparent throughout the conferences, both in what was included within the agenda and how the sessions were titled.

Previous research into the alcohol and gambling industries has found framing focused on individual responsibility and behaviour change (Petticrew, et al., 2017; Babor, 2009; Knai, et al., 2021; van Schalkwyk, et al., 2021). Markham and Young state that: “*The ad-hoc content*

*area of gambling studies has focussed heavily on the psychological behaviour of individual gamblers, without meaningful analysis of the social and economic systems that produce industrial gambling”* (Markham & Young, 2015, p. 3). Deflecting from population level interventions is a closely related concept and was also evident with a focus on at-risk groups, in particular young people, and women. Focusing on the needs and vulnerabilities of specific populations is valid and an essential part of implementing public health interventions. However, in this context and without presentation of whole population approaches, this focus helps to create a framing that harms from the products aren't universal but largely limited to certain demographic vulnerable groups.

Medicalisation and specialisation of solutions links closely with individual responsibility and complexity arguments. As Cowlshaw and Thomas state, gambling industry-funded research “*prioritise intrapersonal targets for intervention (e.g., through psychological or pharmacological therapies*” which can then dominate the evidence base (Cowlshaw & Thomas, 2018, p. 104). Some included alcohol conferences had a highly specialised clinical focus. Adopting a clinical focus is a key part of reducing alcohol harms, however, many of the talks were very specific and unlikely to provide widespread benefit to a population. This is consistent with previous research into alcohol industry funding of research, “*much of it devoted to esoteric biological or clinical issues that have little relevance to public health*” (Babor, 2009, p. 37). These framings could give the impression of insufficient evidence to support well-evidenced policy measures such as those reducing affordability or availability. These framing preferences can also lead to oversupply of research results placing emphasis on gambling (Sulkunen et al. 2019) and alcohol consumption as an issue of the individual instead of society.



## **Strengths and limitations**

To our knowledge, this is the first detailed qualitative analysis of gambling and alcohol conferences receiving industry funding. There were several limitations within the study. We couldn't determine the amount of industry funding provided to each conference, what it was used for and how it compared with other sources of funding. In some cases, the amount received could be small or used to pay for participant fees and travel costs. The analysis didn't focus on a direct comparison between 'industry-funded' and non-industry-funded conferences and so we cannot determine that the funding changes the framings. These framings may be present in both contexts. Further research could examine this. The analysis focused on agendas and programmes with themes emerging from conference sessions and abstract titles, which may not accurately reflect the talks' content. We collected the data from publicly available conference materials, which may introduce selection bias; such conferences may differ systematically from those that choose not to share their materials publicly. To try to reduce this we focused on comparison between the gambling and alcohol industries and the use of the same inclusion and exclusion criteria for both. We didn't reach out to conference organisers directly to request materials, which could have led to a larger sample size. We only included conferences if they had English language materials and so the sample was focused on English-speaking high-income countries. We used publicly declared industry support for conferences directly or by third-party organisations in receipt of industry funding (such as GambleAware) to assess the presence of industry funding, but there may be undeclared funding sources. Funding for certain research can also shape the research landscape. Further research could examine links to industry amongst the speakers with a network analysis of the different actors involved across multiple producers and industry attendees.

## CONCLUSIONS

The alcohol and gambling industries have substantial economic resources and could influence the research landscape through funding conferences. Using the provision of funding can also challenge research that might oppose economic interests and support work which maintains the status quo. Industry influence through research funding and dissemination is an under-researched area, of which conference funding may be the most visible part. In conclusion, whilst we cannot establish causality, framings that are beneficial to the unhealthy commodity industries and which have been documented in other contexts can also be seen in industry-funded conferences. These framings shape the landscape in which harms are understood and may contribute to increasing existing inequalities in harms related to the consumption of these products.

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