“There is no evidence”

Use of evidence and research practice in contested spaces - a case study of gambling
“Regulators often fail to act because we have not yet statistically "proven" an association between an exposure and a disease….

If we can escape from the false dichotomy of "proven vs. not proven," „…..then we can make decisions based on what we do know rather than what we don't”

(Philips & Goodman, 2004)
Governments, politicians and regulators

Industry

Researchers/academics

Campaigning groups

Complex stakeholder environment

The public
“the standards for gambling are even higher than for alcohol as the licensing objectives in the Gambling Act specifically refer to gambling.”

“asserting the existence of vulnerable people in the area - but so what? It’s not presenting evidence that these people are being harmed - a district judge wouldn't accept it.”

“sometimes I think that people demand standards of evidence that are almost impossible to generate because they are looking for causal connections…and it's really, really hard to demonstrate. Even in medicine, it's really hard to demonstrate that A causes B”

“"The holy grail is to change the discourse from 'prove it, prove it" which the smoking industry used in the 1950s to precautionary principles and trying to put in place the measures to avert risk.”
Key debates

• Extent and trends in problem gambling
• The relationship of problem gambling to activities
• B2 gaming machines in bookmakers
• Risk and vulnerable people
Problem gambling rates over time

Comparison of Problem Gambling prevalence rates in 1999, 2007 & 2010

1999 2007 2010

APMS 2007 HSE 2012 SHS 2012
Addicts a very small proportion of gamblers, says report

284,000 are gambling addicts - ‘and it’ll get worse’

Gambling addiction hooks 600,000 people, says report
Differing interpretations among stakeholders

“The best evidence is suggesting that it [the number of problem gamblers] is far from stable, that it has actually gone up significantly over the last three years”

“levels of problem gambling remain broadly the same as before the Act was implemented”

“the BGPS methodology was “suspect” as “you need to tick only three? boxes on the problem gambling scale and you are a problem gambler by definition”

“using data from the HSE/SHeS compared with the BGPS do seem to suggest that problem gambling has decreased in Great Britain”
How to navigate this complexity?

• SRA high quality research protocol
  • Transparency

And:
• Immerse
• Empathise
• Engage
• Reflect
• Teach
A final reflection…

“The facts speak only when the historian calls on them; it is he who decides to which facts to give to the floor, in what order and in what context.”

E.H CARR
Thanks!!

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