

# FAMILY VIOLENCE AMONG HELP-SEEKING GAMBLERS: THE EFFECT OF HAVING DEPENDENT CHILDREN

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# Background

- Family violence and problem gambling are two complex public health issues
- Affected by social and economic factors including gender inequality, socio-economic status, cultural factors, deprivation, substance abuse etc



# Background

- Family violence = intimate partner violence, and violence towards children and other family members
- Includes physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, verbal, and financial abuse, and harassment and stalking



# Background

- Challenges of parenting children living at home can place additional stress on vulnerable families
- Parents with gambling problems co-existent with alcohol dependence, substance abuse or over-eating behaviour, are more likely to be violent and abusive toward their children



# Background

- NZ gambling treatment providers reported high level of family violence amongst their clients
- Very few studies of family violence and harmful gambling, most on intimate partner violence
- Family violence and harmful gambling study conducted in Australia (Victoria) and Hong Kong
- Characteristics of families experiencing harmful gambling limited to studies of family impacts and family coping



## Study rationale

- No research exploring family violence, by gender, in families of problem gamblers with, or without, dependent children

## Study aims

- Examine the effect of the gender of the gambler on the relationship between having dependent children in the household and gambler violence perpetration or victimisation
- Examine how this interaction changed as the contextual factors of family violence were taken into account



# Study design

- 164 help-seeking adult gamblers from three national services recruited
- 18+ years old
- Family violence defined as actual or threatened conduct by a person towards a member of the person's family causing that person to fear for his or her personal wellbeing or safety
- The focus was physical, psychological, emotional and sexual abuse
- Completed survey by telephone
- Family violence groups consulted and provided participant support



# Survey measures

- Modified HITS Scale for family violence
- Socio-demographic data (age, gender, ethnicity, relationship status, employment, income, education)
- Psychosocial data (substance abuse, mental health, aggression, emotion regulation, interpersonal support)
- Gambling data (gambling risk level, motivations to gamble, participation behaviour, treatment)





# Modified HITS Scale

## Victimisation

In the last 12 months has a current or ex-partner or a family member...

- Physically hurt you?
- Insulted or talked down to you?
- Threatened you with harm?
- Screamed or cursed at you?
- Forced you to have sexual activities?

Scored: Yes/No

(Sherin, K.M., Sinacore, J.M., Li, X-O., Zitter, R.E., & Shakil, A. (1998). HITS: A short domestic violence screening tool for use in a family practice setting. *Family Medicine*, 30(7), 508-512.)



# Modified HITS Scale

## Perpetration

In the last 12 months have you ...

- Physically hurt a current or ex-partner or a family member?
- Insulted or talked down to a current or ex-partner or a family member?
- Threatened a current or ex-partner or a family member with harm?
- Screamed or cursed at a current or ex-partner or a family member?
- Forced a current or ex-partner or a family member to have sexual activities?

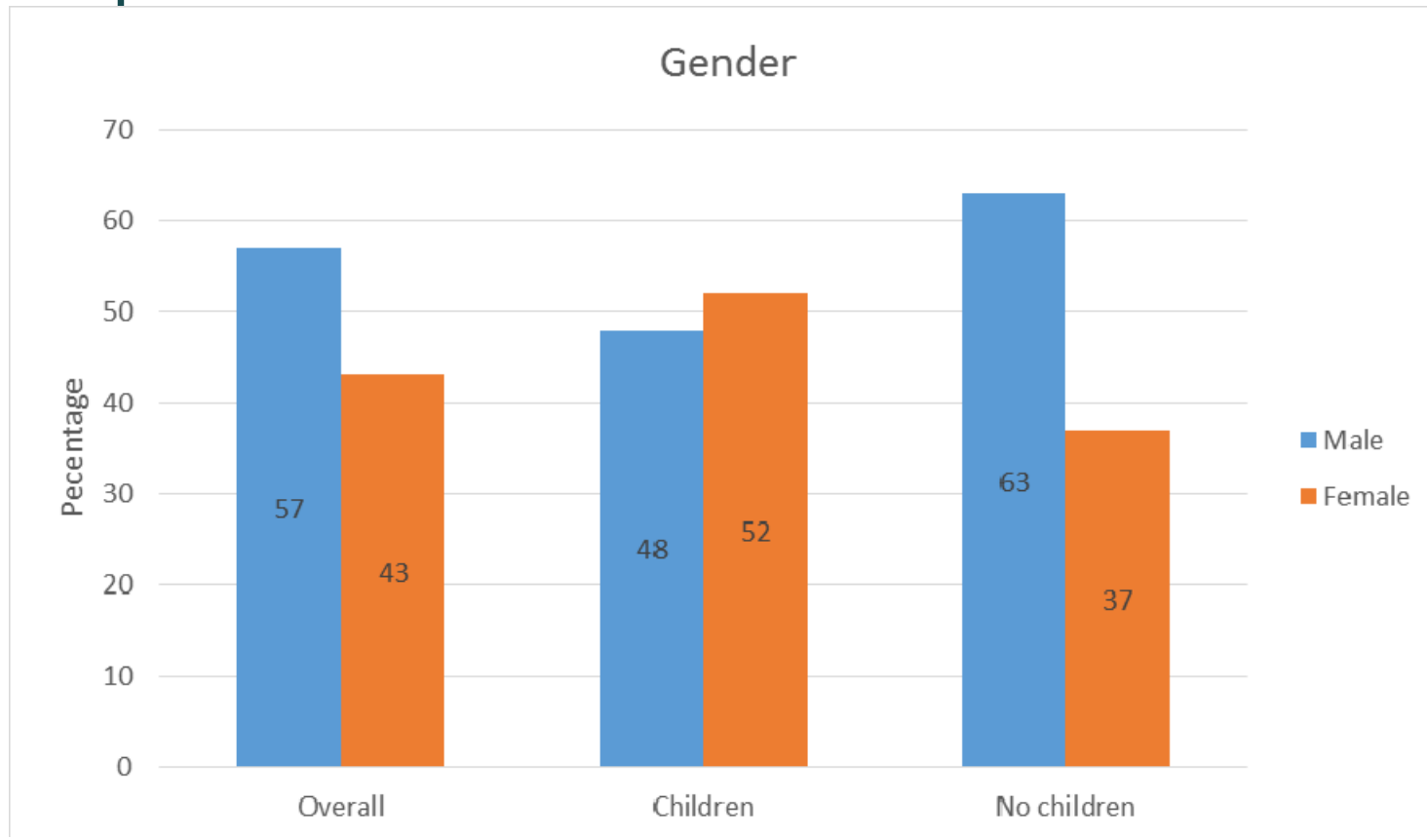


# Data analysis

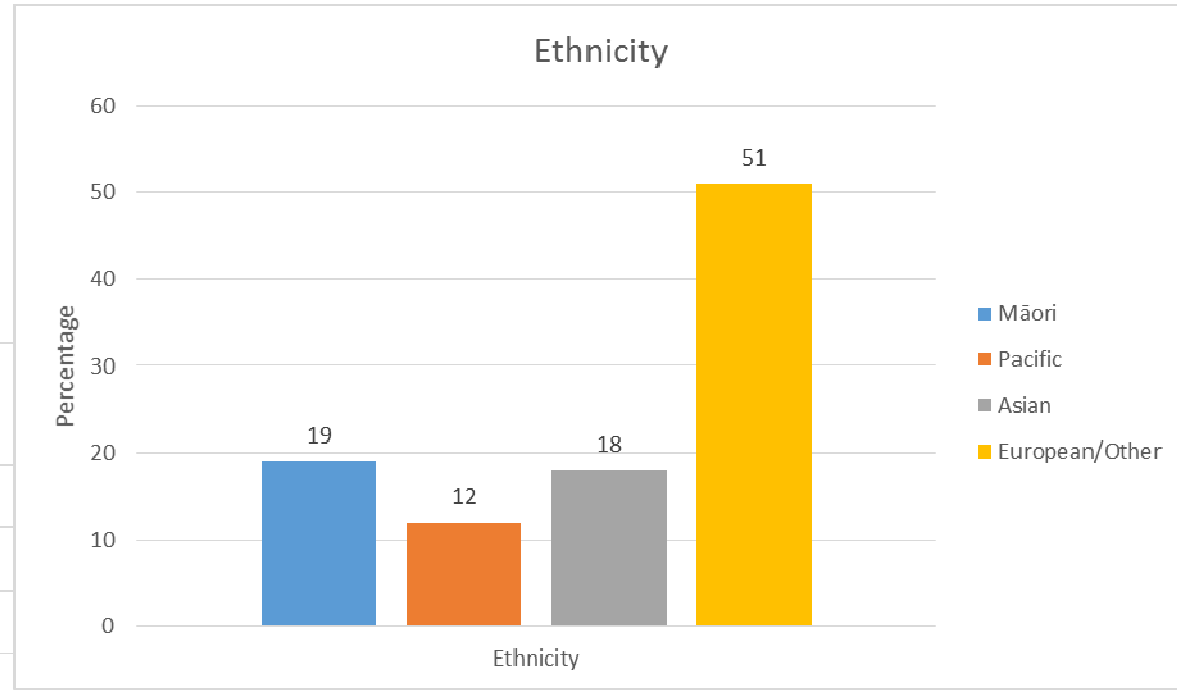
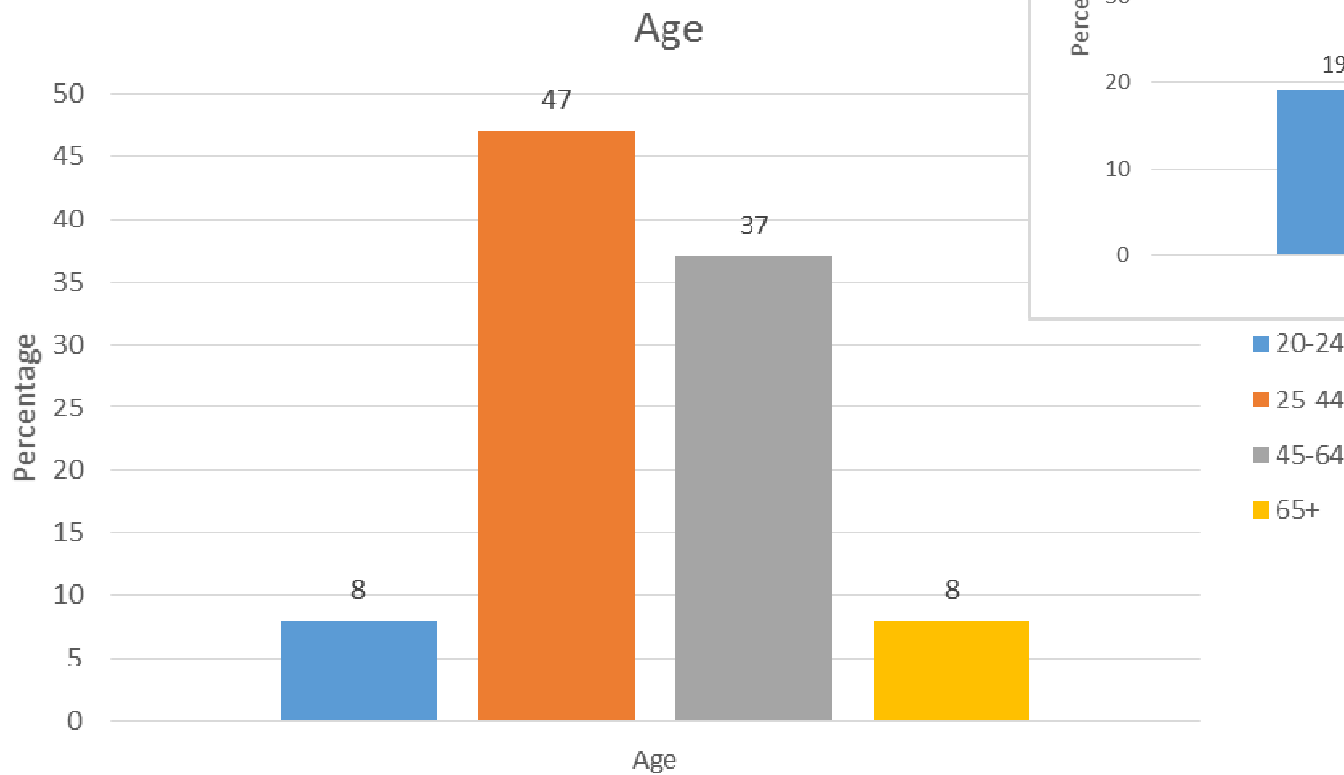
The effect of having dependent children on violence perpetration and victimisation investigated via four logistic multivariable models that took into account respectively, no adjusting factors and then, cumulatively, significant factors from socio-demographic, psychosocial and gambling blocks of variables.



# Participants

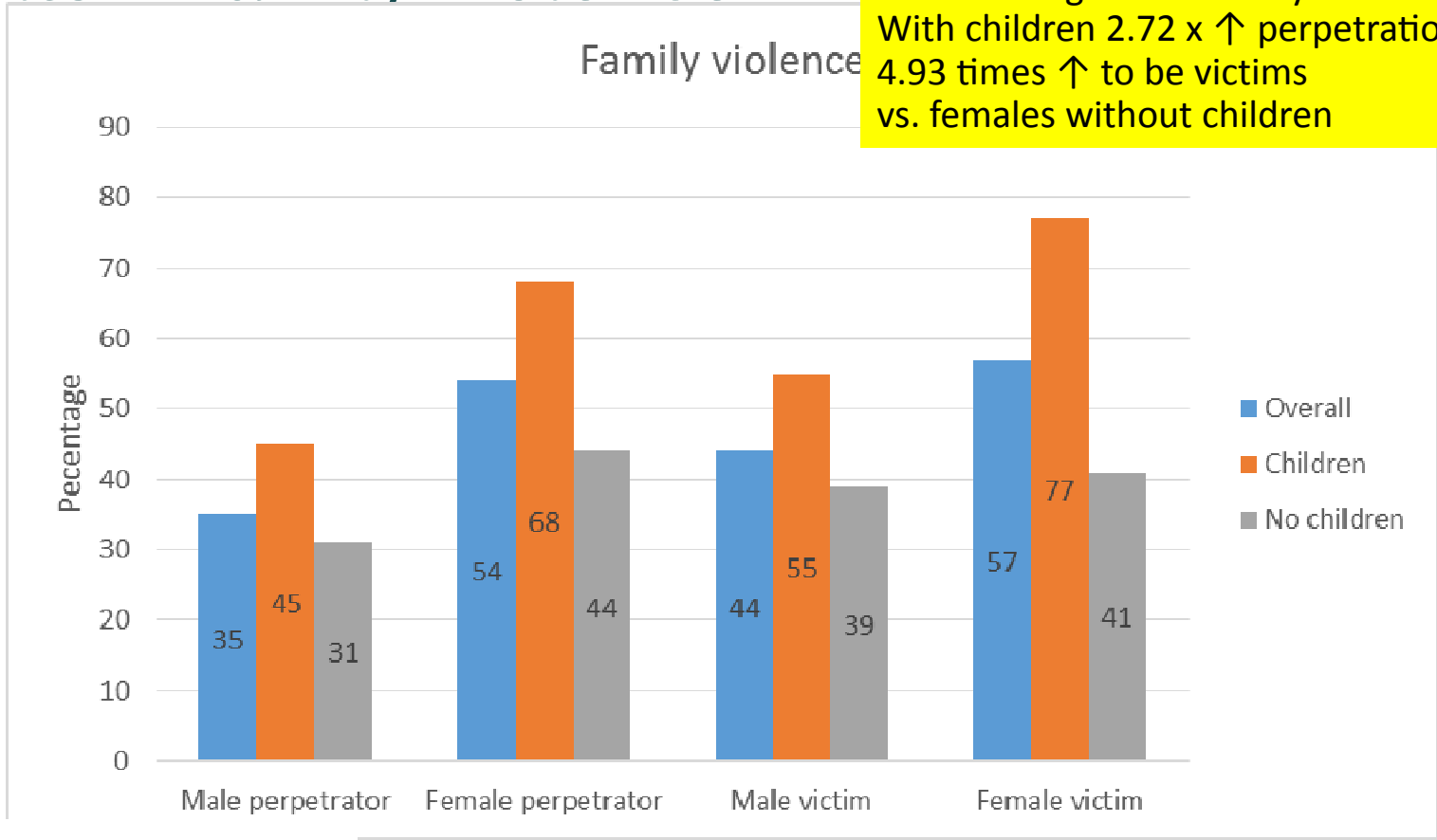


# Participants



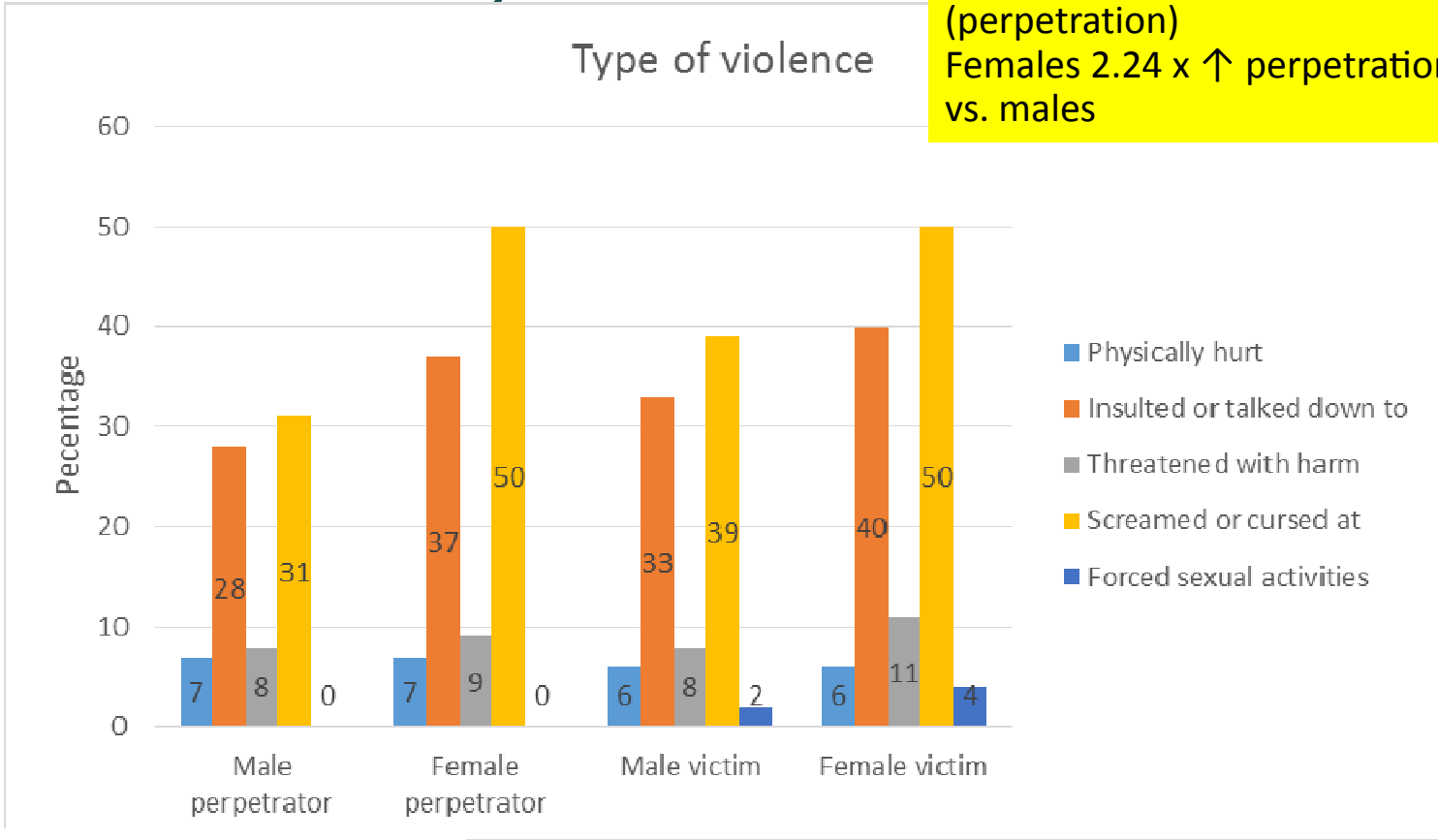
# Results – family violence

Statistical significance only for females  
With children 2.72 x ↑ perpetration  
4.93 times ↑ to be victims  
vs. females without children

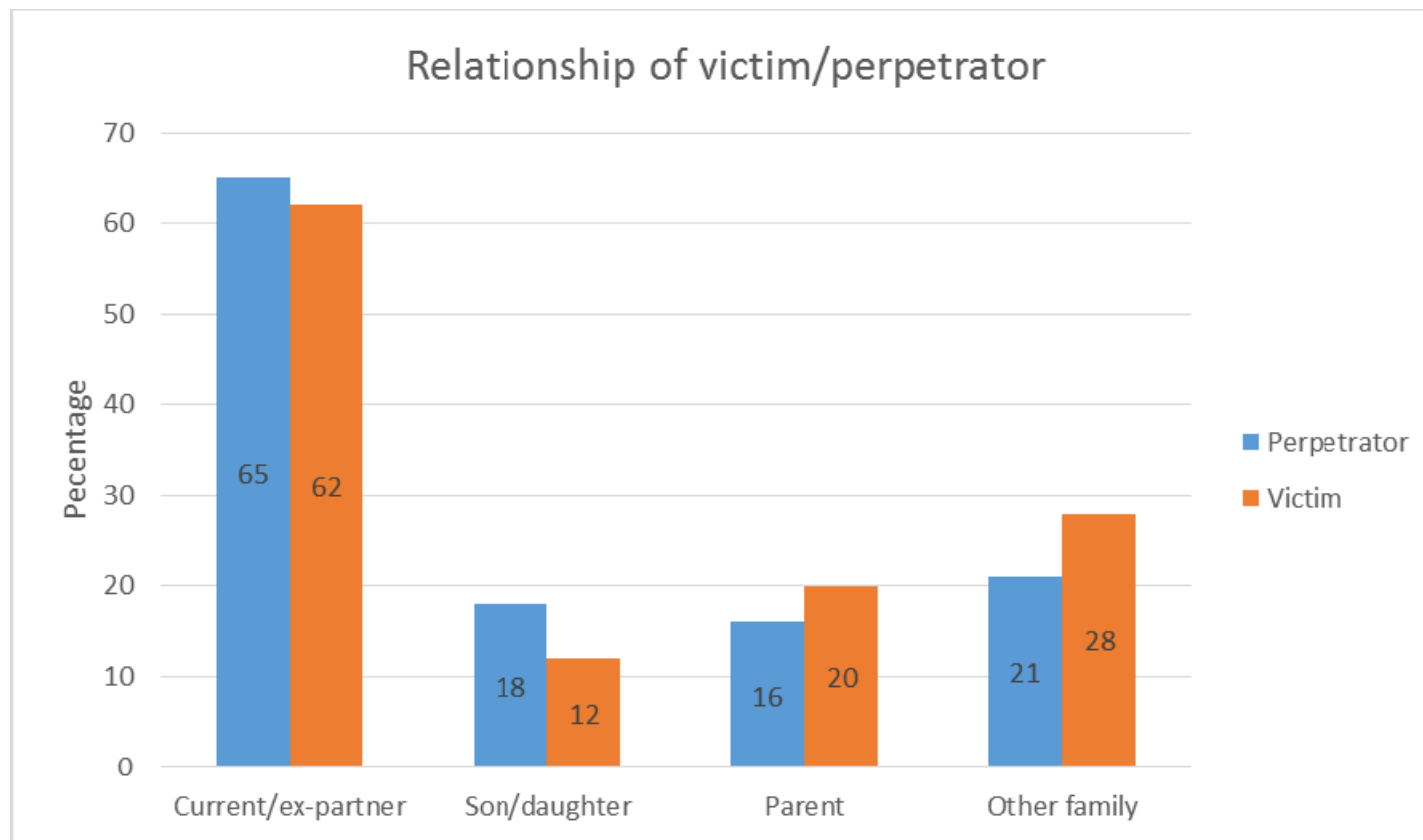


# Results – family violence

Statistical significance only for screaming/cursing (perpetration)  
 Females 2.24 x ↑ perpetration vs. males



# Results – family violence





## Associations with being a victim of violence

- Females with dependent children 5.49 times ↑ vs. males without children
- Adjustors in the statistical model were :
  - Ethnicity (Asian), income support
  - Symptoms of inadequacy
- Statistical significance remained when associated factors accounted for



# Associations with violence perpetration

- Females with dependent children 4.72 times ↑ vs. males without children
- Adjustors in the statistical model were:
  - Ethnicity (Māori and Asian)
  - Anger, emotion regulation, drug issue in family member, tangible support
  - Receiving gambling counselling/medication
- Statistical significance for gender difference disappeared when associated factors accounted for



## Discussion

- Most of the violence is verbal and to partners.
- Females more likely to scream/curse at someone.
- Having dependent children associated with more than 5 times the odds of female gamblers being a victim of family violence compared with male gamblers without children.
- This was after sociodemographic and psychosocial factors known to be associated with violence were adjusted for, and once gambling factors were considered.



## Discussion

- Strong gender dimension to the effect of having dependent children on being a victim of family violence among gamblers.
- Why is the risk higher?
- Over 2/3 of female gamblers with children lived in homes where violence was occurring; 68% where violence was perpetrated by the female gambler, and 77% where the female gambler was a victim of violence.
- Children in such homes were subject to an environment with violence occurring.



## Discussion

- Female gamblers with children significantly associated with more than 4 times the odds for perpetrating family violence than males without dependent children, even after adjusting for significant sociodemographic factors.
- But once psychosocial factors were taken into account, the significance disappeared.
- Suggests that it is *not the combination* of female gender and having dependent children that is related to increased violence perpetration *but the association of that combination with other contextual factors* that leads to the higher risk for perpetrating family violence.



## Study limitations

- Self-selected convenience sample of gamblers seeking treatment
- Didn't assess frequency of violence
- Didn't assess behavioural effects, e.g. intimidation and fear
- Small sample sizes



# Conclusions

- The relationship between having dependent children and being a victim of family violence is gender-related.
- Female gamblers with dependent children had greater odds of being a victim of family violence than male gamblers without dependent children.
- Children living in homes where the mother is a gambler, have a higher risk of living in a household with family violence, increasing their vulnerability to poorer health outcomes.



# Conclusions

- Develop a coordinated collaborative inter-agency and case management approach between health and social service sectors to screen as a harm minimisation measure
  - E.g. gambling treatment services screening for family violence and working with violence support groups
  - Family violence services screening for problem gambling, especially if dependent children are present





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