

Identifying research priorities in gambling through a large-scale expert study

What this research is about

Gambling has undergone rapid growth in recent years and is now a legal activity in most countries. While many people do not experience harms from gambling, a sizeable number of people do. Furthermore, some people develop problem gambling (PG) or gambling disorder (GD).

The topic of gambling and PG has only recently been viewed through the lens of public health. Studies have examined numerous issues related to gambling, from epidemiology to the treatment of PG. Constrained by both limited financial and human capital resources, it has become increasingly important to identify priority areas for future gambling research.

To date, there have been few organized attempts to identify the top priorities for gambling research. One exception was the development of the consensus view conducted by the National United Kingdom Research Network for Behavioural Addictions. A previous attempt was also undertaken by a team of international gambling experts; however, compiling a list of research priorities was a secondary aim in that effort. Thus, a more comprehensive framework for gambling research priorities is still lacking.

The primary aim of this study was to bring together gambling experts to more systematically identify future priority areas for gambling research. To this end, the Research Priority Setting in Gambling Project Core Group (PCG) was created. The objective of this initiative was to identify key research priorities on a global level using a systematic methodology.

What the researchers did

What you need to know

In this study, the researchers contacted gambling experts, stakeholders, and regulators to gather opinions on gambling research priorities for the next five years. Some of the top research priorities were rates of problem gambling among underserved populations, emerging forms of gambling, and co-occurrence with other disorders. Additional research priorities highlighted the need for research on advertising, youth, and minority populations, and longitudinal data. Other top-priority topics included treatment options, prevention, and policy on advertising. Evaluating and tailoring existing interventions were prioritized over creating new interventions.

The PCG team included eight researchers belonging to different institutions. The team was representative of gender, jurisdiction, and research expertise. The researchers adapted a similar methodology used for the Child Health and Nutrition Research Initiative (CHNRI). The primary aim was to identify gambling-related research priorities for the next five years.

In Phase 1, gambling experts were consulted to identify relevant research questions. Experts were identified as being the first, last, or corresponding author of a minimum of two gambling publications. They were invited to complete an online survey and provided 3 to 6 research questions that they believed to be important to address in the next five years. Their suggestions were coded and sorted into 102 research options.

For Phase 2, the experts were invited to rate the research options against six criteria from a global perspective. Scores were averaged to provide a Research Priority Score (RPS) for each criterion. Lastly, in Phase 3, stakeholders such as gambling regulators and policy makers were invited to complete an online survey and assign relative weights to the criteria used for the evaluation of the research options.

What the researchers found

For Phase 1, a total of 307 experts completed the survey and provided 1361 research questions, which were sorted into 102 research options. Among them, 266 experts also took part in Phase 2. Finally, 14 stakeholders participated in Phase 3. The top 25 research priorities were identified as a result.

The researchers grouped the research priorities into 'description-type' and 'intervention-focused'. For description-type research priorities, the most common themes were epidemiological, including rates of PG among underserved populations, emerging forms of gambling, and co-occurrence with other disorders. The second most common theme was etiological, with priorities placed on advertising, risk and protective factors in youth and minority groups, and longitudinal data. Other research priorities were related to treatment needs of minority groups, gambling harms, and taxonomy, specifically reaching consensus regarding the definition and measures of at-risk gambling and PG.

For intervention-focused research priorities, the themes were related to treatment options, prevention, and policy on advertising. Evaluating and tailoring existing interventions were prioritized over creating new interventions. Identifying factors underlying treatment seeking, drop out, and relapse was also a priority.

How you can use this research

These findings could be of interest to researchers as well as policy makers involved in the prevention and intervention of gambling harms.

About the researchers

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