

Increased alcohol use is associated with elevated sports betting engagement

What this research is about

Problem gambling (PG) is an addictive behaviour that is associated with numerous personal and societal harms. Sports betting, in particular, has raised concerns due to its rapid expansion and appeal among young adults. An increasing number of studies has linked sports betting with gambling harms.

It is well known that gambling commonly occurs in the presence of other substance uses. Research has revealed that alcohol use is prevalent among people who engage in sports betting. This is especially concerning given that young adults are often more susceptible to both alcohol use disorder and PG. Recent studies confirm that young adults who take part in sports betting drink more frequently and experience more alcohol use disorder symptoms.

Although there appears to be an association between alcohol use and sports betting, questions remain about how stable this relationship is and whether the two behaviours influence each other over time. Longitudinal research that follows people over time is required to more thoroughly examine how sports betting and alcohol use may fluctuate together.

In the current study, the researchers aimed to gain insight into how alcohol use influences sports betting behaviours among young adults. Using a longitudinal research design, data were collected every two weeks over one year. It was predicted that more frequent alcohol use in the past two weeks would be linked with greater engagement in sports betting, riskier betting patterns, chasing losses, and experiencing more negative consequences due to sports betting.

What the researchers did

What you need to know

Alcohol use and gambling frequently occur together. In addition, alcohol use disorders occur at greater rates among people experiencing problem gambling. Sports betting is especially popular among young adults and so is alcohol use. However, the influence of alcohol use on sports betting over time is not well understood. In this study, the researchers examined alcohol use and sports betting among young adults aged 18–29 years. A total of 210 young adults completed a survey every 2 weeks over one year. The results indicated that more frequent alcohol use in the past 2 weeks was associated with increased sports betting. Moreover, increased alcohol use in the past 2 weeks was associated with greater amounts wagered, loss chasing, and a greater likelihood of experiencing harmful consequences from sports betting. But young adults who drank more heavily than others did not necessarily display greater engagement in sports betting.

The researchers recruited young adults in the United States through advertisements placed on social media platforms. Participants must be between 18 and 29, have engaged in sports betting at least twice in the past month, and have never received treatment for problem gambling. Participants must also pass a test of sports betting knowledge and a question designed to screen for dishonest answers.

After screening, the final sample consisted of 210 young adults, with 77.1% being male. The average age was 24.5 years old. Most participants were white (64.8%) and had attained a college degree (70.5%). Each person was contacted by telephone and provided instructions for the study. They were then given a link to the first baseline survey. From there,

participants were invited to complete 25 additional surveys over one year, with one survey every two weeks. A \$30 USD gift card was provided after the baseline survey, and an additional \$10 USD gift card was given for each subsequent survey.

On average, participants completed 19.8 biweekly surveys. Just over 50% of participants completed at least 24 surveys. Each survey asked how many days they drank alcohol in the past 2 weeks (alcohol use frequency), how many days they bet on sports in the past 2 weeks (sports betting frequency), how many bets they placed on days they bet on sports, total amount wagered, and how many times they placed a bet to try to win back what they lost (chasing losses). The 5-item subscale of the PGSI-SB was used to assess negative consequences due to sports betting.

What the researchers found

First, as predicted, when young adults had drunk alcohol more frequently in the past 2 weeks (relative to their usual frequency), they tended to increase their sports betting. Each additional day of alcohol use was associated with a 7.7% increase in number of days betting on sports, and 9.4% increase in total number of bets made. However, young adults who drank more heavily than others did not necessarily display higher levels of sports betting. These results suggest that a person's change in their alcohol use is more predictive of later sports betting behaviour.

Increased alcohol use in the past 2 weeks was also associated with greater amounts of money wagered and greater loss chasing during subsequent sports betting. It was also related to a much greater likelihood of experiencing harmful consequences from sports betting. This was true even after considering the number of sports bets a person made, suggesting that alcohol was a unique contributor to gambling harms.

How you can use this research

The findings of this study suggest that increased alcohol use has a significant influence on subsequent sports betting behaviour. The results could be of interest to policy makers and public health staff in designing targeted prevention

campaigns for young adults who bet on sports. Similarly, this knowledge could be valuable for clinicians who are treating people who experience problem gambling.

About the researchers

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