

research snapshot

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An examination of sports betting, problem gambling, and the breadth and depth of gambling activities

What this research is about

Sports betting is now legal in many states in the United States. As such, it has grown in popularity over the past five years. Previous research has suggested that sports betting is a risk factor for problem gambling. It is important to examine the breadth and depth of gambling involvement as this helps enhance understanding of problem gambling behaviours and outcomes. Breadth of gambling involvement refers to the variety of gambling activities people engage in. Depth of gambling involvement can be measured by the frequency of gambling, time spent gambling, and money spent on gambling. The purpose of this study was to examine the risks of sports-betting behaviour while accounting for the breadth and depth of gambling activities.

What the researchers did

The researchers used YouGov America to recruit two samples of American adults. The first sample was randomly recruited from the general population. This sample was matched to U.S. norms of age, gender, education, census region, and race/ethnicity based on the 2019 American Community Survey. A total of 2806 participants completed the survey, representing a response rate of 88%. Among them, 1561 participants had gambled in the past year. About half (51%) of these participants were men. On average, these participants were 50 years old.

The second sample consisted of sports-betting adults in the U.S. A total of 1557 participants were included in this sample, representing a response rate of 79%. Most of the participants were men (67%).

Both samples completed an online survey. The online survey included questions about the following:

What you need to know

The purpose of this study was to examine the risks of sports-betting behaviour while accounting for the breadth and depth of gambling activities. The researchers used YouGov America to recruit participants. Participants were split into two groups, including 1561 adults who gambled on sports and 1251 adults who gambled but not on sports. Participants completed an online survey. Breadth of gambling involvement was measured by the number of different types of gambling that participants engaged in. Depth of gambling was measured by frequency of gambling. Problem gambling behaviour was measured using the Problem Gambling Severity Index. Compared to those who gambled but not on sports, participants who bet on sports had greater breadth and depth of gambling. They were also more likely to be at risk of problem gambling. But there was no link between specific forms of sports gambling and risk of problem gambling. Instead, the breadth of gambling and depth of gambling were more strongly linked to problem gambling symptoms.

- (1) Past-year engagement with the following categories of sports betting: traditional sports betting, fantasy sports, daily fantasy sports, and esports betting.
- (2) Gambling breadth was measured by asking participants about the types of gambling that they participated in over the past year. This included card games, track betting, dice games, prop bets, lottery/number games, bingo, slots/electronic gaming machines, pull tabs, keno, and scratch offs.

- (3) Depth of gambling involvement was measured in terms of frequency of gambling. Participants were asked how often they had engaged in any gambling activity over the past year.
- (4) Problem gambling behaviour was measured using the Problem Gambling Severity Index. Participants who scored 0 were considered to have no risk. Those who scored 1–4 points had low risk. Those who scored 5–7 had moderate risk. Those who scored 8 and above were at high risk.

The samples were combined into two groups. The first group included 1889 participants who had gambled on sports in the past year. Participants in this group were mostly male (64%) and were 46 years old on average. This group was contrasted with the second group of 1251 participants who gambled but not on sports. On average, participants in the second group were 54 years old. About 42% were men.

What the researchers found

Participants who bet on sports in the past 12 months gambled more frequently compared to those who gambled but not on sports. People who bet on sports averaged between monthly and weekly play. Those who did not bet on sports averaged a frequency of gambling between once or twice or monthly.

Participants who bet on sports participated in a wider breadth of gambling activities than those who did not bet on sports. Most participants (67.2%) who bet on sports engaged in four or more gambling activities. By contrast, most participants who did not bet on sports engaged in one or two gambling activities (67.2%).

Participants who bet on sports had higher rates of problem gambling than those who gambled but not on sports. About one-third of those who gambled on sports were at high risk, while 6% of participants who gambled but not on sports were at high risk.

There was no link between specific forms of sports gambling and higher risk of problem gambling. In fact, traditional fantasy sports and traditional sports betting were linked to a lower likelihood of problem gambling. Overall, the researchers found that the

breadth of gambling and depth of gambling were more strongly linked to problem gambling symptoms than any specific form of sports betting.

How you can use this research

Policy makers can use this research to determine where to best focus gambling harm prevention resources and policies.

About the researchers

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