

Relationships between impulsivity, risky betting behaviour, and gambling disorder among people who bet online on sports

What this research is about

Sports betting has become an increasingly popular form of gambling. This is driven by the rise of online sports betting platforms following legal changes. Concerns have been raised about the negative impacts of sports betting on gambling disorder.

Impulsivity is a well-known risk factor for gambling disorder. There are multiple facets to impulsivity. One definition proposes three facets: impulsive choice, impulsive action, and impulsive personality traits. Impulsive choice reflects a preference for small, immediate rewards over larger but delayed rewards. Impulsive action reflects a failure to inhibit an action when it is no longer appropriate. Impulsive personality traits reflect a tendency to act rashly, such as when feeling strong positive or negative emotions.

Little is known about the causal pathways through which impulsivity might contribute to gambling disorder among people who bet on sports online. In this study, the researchers looked at whether impulsivity leads to risky betting behaviour and more severe gambling disorder over time among people who bet online on sports. They also tested whether risky betting behaviour explains the link between impulsivity and gambling disorder.

What the researchers did

The researchers recruited adults who regularly bet on sports online and were registered with Tipico, an online sports betting provider. Participants were located in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. To be

What you need to know

In this study, the researchers looked at whether impulsivity leads to risky betting behaviour and more severe gambling disorder over time among people who gamble online on sports. Impulsivity was defined as impulsive choice, impulsive action, and impulsive personality traits. The researchers recruited 954 people who gambled on sports registered with Tipico, an online sports betting provider. Participants were located in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. Of those, 427 completed three online surveys, each three months apart, between October 2023 and June 2024.

Making more impulsive choices predicted more severe gambling disorder over time. Some impulsive personality traits also predicted more severe gambling disorder over time. However, impulsive action was not associated with gambling disorder severity. Moreover, impulsivity was not associated with risky betting behaviour, nor did risky betting behaviour explain the relationship between impulsivity and gambling disorder.

eligible, participants must have placed at least one sports bet within the three months before the study.

Participants completed three online surveys that were each three months apart, between October 2023 and June 2024. Each survey contained questionnaires and behavioural tasks, including:

- Questions assessing gambling disorder symptoms as per the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th edition (DSM-5).
- The Monetary Choice Questionnaire (MCQ) to assess impulsive choice. The MCQ asked participants to choose between smaller monetary rewards available soon or larger monetary rewards available later.
- The Go/No-go task to assess impulsive action.
- The German version of the SUPPS-P Impulsive Behavior Scale to assess impulsive personality traits.

The researchers also used tracking data from each participant's Tipico account to assess risky betting behaviour. Risky betting behaviour was assessed based on multiple betting characteristics, like active betting days per month, number of bets per month, money spent per month, and deposits/withdrawals per month.

What the researchers found

A total of 954 participants completed the first survey. On average, participants were 34 years old. There were more male (94.44%) than female participants (5.45%). Most participants (90.78%) spoke German as their mother tongue. Of these participants, 427 completed all three surveys.

The researchers found that making more impulsive choices predicted more severe gambling disorder over time. In contrast, impulsive action was not a significant predictor.

Several impulsive personality traits also predicted more severe gambling disorder over time. These included higher negative and positive urgency (i.e., tendency to behave impulsively when experiencing intense negative or positive emotions), higher lack of premeditation (i.e., tendency to act without thinking), and lower perseveration (i.e., inability to continue working toward a goal when the task is difficult or boring). However, sensation seeking was not a significant predictor.

Impulsivity, whether defined as impulsive choice, action, or personality traits, was not significantly associated with future risky betting behaviour. Moreover, risky betting behaviour did not explain the

relationship between impulsivity and gambling disorder.

How you can use this research

The findings provide insight into the causal role of impulsivity and risky betting behaviour in gambling disorder among people who bet on sports online. Future research can look at other factors (e.g., social, emotional, cognitive) that might explain how impulsivity can lead to gambling disorder in this population.

About the researchers

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