



Do features of sports bars encourage drinking and gambling?

What this research is about

Drinking alcohol while watching sports is extremely common. There is growing concern that people who bet on sports use alcohol in a problematic way. One venue that people who enjoy sports and drinking may visit are sports bars. However, there is little research that examines how sports bars may encourage risky gambling and/or drinking.

Features of the environment that encourage patrons to behave in a certain way are called choice architecture. In the gambling literature, choice architecture that encourages gambling are called dark nudges. Features such as the way an environment is lit (bright vs. dim) can subtly encourage or discourage certain types of behaviour, such as excessive gambling and drinking.

The goal of this study was to examine features of sports bars in Victoria, Australia that encourage patrons to drink and gamble. The identification of such features could lead to recommendations to change them in the interest of public health.

What the researchers did

First, the researchers searched public databases to identify venues in Victoria, Australia that met their criteria. The venues needed to be places where people bet on sports and drank alcohol. The researchers identified 2749 venues. Then they checked the websites of these venues to see whether sports telecasting was promoted by the venue. This resulted in 658 venues.

Second, the researchers randomly selected and visited 50 of the 658 venues. The selected venues included inner-city, suburban, and regional venues. The

What you need to know

People who like to drink alcohol while watching sports are likely to do so in a sports bar. This study examined if there are features of sports bars that encourage drinking and/or gambling. They visited 50 sports bars in Victoria, Australia. They also interviewed 200 patrons. The researchers found that there were three distinct types of sports bars: 1) prototypical sports bars, 2) venues that have a sports bar section, 3) venues that occasionally televise sports. Patrons of prototypical sports bars were the least likely to be there to watch sports and to place sports bets. Patrons of venues with sports bar sections were the most likely to bet but in smaller amounts. This type of venues also prominently featured electronic gaming machines. Further research on sports bars is still required.

researchers recorded several features of each venue: size; number of rooms; primary features (sports, drinking, dining); prominence of sports telecasting; presence of sports, alcohol, or gambling promotion materials; availability of in-person betting services, known as TAB outlets; and the venue's target demographic.

Third, the researchers interviewed 200 sports bar patrons at four venues. Patrons were interviewed on a Friday between 6 and 10 PM. Patrons were asked for their age and gender. They were asked how long they had been at that venue and how many drinks they had consumed. They were also asked if they intended to bet on sports that night. Finally, patrons were asked about their general drinking and sports betting habits (e.g., frequency, quantity).

What the researchers found

The researchers found that sports bars in Victoria fell within three categories. The “prototypical sports bar” was a venue where sports were continuously broadcasted and was marketed as an environment to watch sports (1.5% of venues). “Venues that have a sports bar section” were those that were primarily for another activity (drinking, dining) but had a separate section dedicated to sports watching (55.8% of venues). The third category was “venues that occasionally televise sports” but did not have a dedicated section (42.7% of venues). Each type of venue differed from the others in significant ways.

Prototypical sports bars featured the most television screens on average. They promoted sports and alcohol frequently, but not gambling. Over half of these venues appeared to target younger men. The patrons of prototypical sports bars were the least likely to bet on sports of all three venues. Prototypical sports bars were particularly popular with families. No features characteristic of dark nudges towards gambling were observed. However, dark nudges towards alcohol, such as dim lighting, were observed.

Patrons of venues with a sports bar section were the most likely to place sports bets, but they tended to bet with smaller amounts. TAB outlets were frequently prominent. Electronic gaming machines (EGMs) were also very common in these venues. These venues appeared to target older men.

Venues that televise sport on occasion were similar to traditional English-style pubs. They did not seem to target a particular demographic. Dark nudges towards drinking were noted, but not towards gambling. On average, patrons of these venues placed the largest wagers on sports betting on the night interviewed.

How you can use this research

This study could be useful for researchers interested in the intersection of sports betting and alcohol use. The results demonstrated that different types of sports bars encourage drinking or gambling in different ways. Future research is required on how public health interventions could target sports bars.

About the researchers

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Citation

Pennay, A., Livingston, M., Cook, M., Room, R., Dwyer, R., MacLean, S., O’Brien, N., Nicholson, M., & Kuntsche, E. (2021). Sports bars: Environmental design, drinking, and sports betting. *Addiction Research & Theory*, 29(4), 316-326.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/16066359.2020.1830071>

Study funding

This study was funded by the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation in partnership with the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation.

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