

Alcohol use and gambling harm among adults in Victoria, Australia

What this research is about

Previous research has found that many people drink alcohol while gambling. This increases the likelihood of risky gambling, but few studies have focused on the link between alcohol use and gambling-related harms. Although related, risky gambling does not necessarily lead to harm. The purpose of this study was to examine whether alcohol use while gambling and engaging in heavy episodic drinking (HED) are linked to experience of any gambling harm and number of harms among adults living in Victoria, Australia. HED is defined as having six or more drinks (i.e., 60 g of pure alcohol) on a single occasion.

What the researchers did

The researchers used data from the 2023 Victorian Population Gambling and Health Study (VPGHS). The VPGHS is a mobile-phone-only survey that recruited a representative sample of residents of the Australian state of Victoria. A total of 11,000 respondents completed the survey. Among them, a subsample completed additional questions, including questions about their alcohol use. The current study used data from this subsample of 3,114 respondents.

The researchers considered the following measures in the analysis:

- An expanded version of the Short Gambling Harm Screen (GHS-10). Four additional items were added to the original 10-item scale because of their policy relevance to Victoria.
- Frequency of alcohol use while gambling.
- Heavy episodic drinking, using the third item of the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT-C).

What you need to know

This study examined whether alcohol use while gambling and engaging in heavy episodic drinking (HED) are linked to experience of gambling harm among adults living in Victoria, Australia. The researchers used data from the 2023 Victorian Population Gambling and Health Study. A total of 3,115 adults who completed additional questions about their alcohol use were included in the study. Among them, 1,918 had gambled in the past year (61%).

People who drank alcohol while gambling were more likely to experience any gambling harm and to experience a higher number of harms than those who did not drink while gambling. This link remained even after accounting for gambling frequency, gambling spending, and demographic characteristics. HED alone was not independently associated with gambling harms after these other factors were considered. But people who both drank while gambling and engaged in HED experienced the highest risk of gambling harms.

- Gambling participation, frequency of engaging in various gambling activities (e.g., lottery, sports betting), and gambling spending in a year.
- Demographics (i.e., gender, age group, region, ethnicity, and annual personal income).

What the researchers found

Participant characteristics: Of the 3,114 participants, 1,918 (61%) had gambled in the last year. Among them, 14% experienced at least one gambling harm.

More men than women experienced gambling harms (20% vs 8%). Additionally, younger people and those who gambled more frequently and spent more money gambling experienced more gambling harms. People who drank alcohol while gambling and those who engaged in HED were also more likely to report gambling harms. Those who did both reported the highest number of harms.

Alcohol use and any gambling harm: Alcohol use was linked to experience of any gambling harm. People who sometimes drank while gambling were twice as likely to report at least one harm from gambling. People who often or always drank alcohol while gambling had about three times higher odds of experiencing at least one gambling harm. The link between alcohol use while gambling and any gambling harm remained after accounting for gambling frequency, gambling spending, and sociodemographic characteristics.

People who engaged in HED at least weekly were twice as likely to report at least one harm from gambling, compared to people who never drank heavily. But after accounting for alcohol use while gambling, gambling behaviour, and demographic characteristics, HED was no longer independently linked to experience of any gambling harm.

Alcohol use and number of gambling harms: People who sometimes drank while gambling had 2.4 times higher rates of gambling harm than those who never drank while gambling. Those who often/always drank while gambling had 2.5 times higher rates. The link between alcohol use while gambling and number of gambling harms remained, even after controlling for other factors. HED was no longer associated with a higher number of harms after controlling for other factors.

Interaction of alcohol use while gambling and HED: People who often or always drank while gambling, and engaged in HED on a weekly or daily basis, were more likely to experience any gambling harm. This link remained after controlling for gambling frequency, gambling spending, and socio-demographic characteristics. These participants also experienced a higher number of gambling harms.

How you can use this research

This study can inform policies and strategies to reduce alcohol availability in gambling settings as part of efforts to prevent gambling-related harms.

About the researchers

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Citation

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