

knowledge snapshot

Global prevalence of gambling and problem gambling among adults and adolescents



What this article is about

The gambling industry has grown rapidly worldwide. This is accompanied by a rise in gambling participation and problem gambling. The aim of this systematic review was to examine the prevalence of gambling, any risk gambling, and problem gambling, including across different gambling activities, in both adults and adolescents. Any risk gambling was defined as experiencing at least one behavioural symptom or negative consequence from gambling. For most gambling measures, this meant a score of at least 1. Problem gambling indicated a substantial risk of harm. It was assessed based on the cut-off score used by each measure to classify problem gambling.

What was done?

The authors searched academic databases for peer-reviewed studies, including MEDLINE, Embase, and PsycInfo. They also searched the grey literature. Included studies had to be published in or after 2010. They had to be quantitative and report on at least one of the following:

- An estimate of the prevalence of gambling, any risk gambling, or problem gambling.
- An estimate of the prevalence of any risk or problem gambling among people who gambled in the past year.
- The number or proportion of people who engaged in different gambling activities.

Studies were excluded if they (1) did not report original research; (2) were clinical trials; (3) used case-control or trial methods; (4) had fewer than 40 participants; (5) recruited participants based on gambling disorder or another clinical diagnosis; or (6) recruited potentially biased samples (e.g., only men participants between 18 and 25 years).

Why is this article important?

This article provides updated estimates of the prevalence of gambling among adults and adolescents across the globe. It also examines the prevalence of gambling across different gambling activities and provides estimates of any risk and problem gambling. This is helpful for policy makers in identifying the scale of gambling-related issues and understanding the proportion of the population that might experience harms.

The risk of bias of each study was assessed using the critical appraisal checklist for prevalence studies from the Joanna Briggs Institute.

What you need to know

A total of 3,692 articles published between 2010 and 2024 were identified. Of these, 580 articles met the inclusion criteria. After further screening, 342 articles were included in the analyses. These studies involved 366 unique samples, covering 68 countries and territories. The most common measures of any risk and problematic gambling were the Problem Gambling Severity Index, DSM-IV or DSM-5 criteria, and the South Oaks Gambling Screen.

Prevalence of any gambling: Globally, 46.2% of adults had gambled in the past 12 months. Men had higher rates of gambling than women (49.1% vs. 37.4%). Australasia (70%) and North America (61.3%) had the highest prevalence of gambling among adults.

Among adolescents, 17.9% had gambled in the previous year. Girls had lower rates of gambling (21%) than boys (40.8%). North America had the highest prevalence of gambling among adolescents (33.7%).

Prevalence of any risk and problematic gambling:

Among adults who gambled in the past 12 months, 10.9% of women and 17.9% of men engaged in any risk gambling. Among them, 1.2% of women and 2.8% of men experienced problem gambling. The regions with the highest estimates of any risk and problem gambling were North America (20.6% for any risk gambling and 4.7% for problem gambling) and Eastern Europe (21.9% for any risk gambling and 4% for problem gambling).

There were limited data on any risk and problem gambling among adolescents. Boys had higher rates of any risk gambling (27.2-43.3% across regions) than girls (6.6-19.4%). Boys also had higher rates of problem gambling (11-16.4%) than girls (1.9-6.6%). Among adolescents who gambled in the past year, North America (34%) and Australasia (33.7%) had higher estimates of any risk gambling than Western Europe (18.4%). Australasia had the highest estimate for problem gambling (12.8%).

Gambling activities: The most common form of gambling activities among adults were lottery or raffle tickets (44.7%) and instant lottery or win games (23.9%). About 11.6% of adults gambled on electronic gaming machines, 8.4% bet on races, and 7.8% gambled online. The highest estimates of problem gambling were among adults who used online casino or slots (15.8%) and casino gambling (10%).

Adolescents most frequently gambled on instant lottery or win games (13.2%). Among adolescents who gambled in the past year, 48.7% reported online gambling. Other common gambling activities included instant lottery or win games (42.9%), lottery or raffle tickets (44.5%), and private or non-commercial gambling (48.5%). Betting on races (29.1%) and online casino or slots gambling (26.4%) had the highest rates of problem gambling among adolescents.

Who is it intended for?

Policy makers can use this study to inform strategies to protect adults and adolescents from gambling-related harms. The findings can also inform practitioners and researchers.

About the researchers

Lucy T. Tran, Samantha Colledge-Frisby, Sophia Taylor, Michelle Lynch, Michael Farrell, and Louisa Degenhardt are affiliated with the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre at the University of New South Wales in Australia. **Heather Wardle** and **Christopher Bunn** are affiliated with the School of Social and Political Sciences at the University of Glasgow in Scotland. **Jürgen Rehm** is affiliated with the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health in Canada. **Rachel Volberg** is affiliated with the School of Public Health and Health Science at the University of Massachusetts in USA. **Virve Marionneau** is affiliated with the Centre for Research on Addiction, Control, and Governance at the University of Helsinki in Finland. **Shekhar Saxena** is affiliated with the Department of Global Health and Population at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health in USA. For more information about this study, please contact Lucy T. Tran at thi.b.tran@unsw.edu.au.

Citation

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