

A review of online gambling policies relevant for youths aged 25 and under

What this research is about

Gambling can cause financial, social, and emotional harms. Online gambling is associated with greater risk than offline gambling. Youths are particularly vulnerable to harms from online gambling. This is because online gambling is widely available and it is difficult to enforce age restrictions. Also, people may use illegal sites to gamble online.

As governments across the world open up gambling markets, youths may be at an increased risk of gambling harms. The best approach to gambling regulations to protect the wellbeing of youths is currently unknown. This review summarizes the existing research on the effectiveness of online gambling policies relevant for youths aged 25 and under.

What the researchers did

The researchers searched several research databases (Web of Science, Scopus, and PubMed) for studies that examined gambling and gaming policies. This review focused specifically on gambling policies.

To be included in the review, studies must meet the following criteria:

- Published in the English language.
- Empirical studies examining policies, legislations, or regulations of online gambling relevant to the mental health of youths aged 25 years and younger. Studies examining policies targeted at people aged 18 and older were also included because these policies could have an impact on youths aged 25 and under.

What you need to know

Youths are particularly vulnerable to the negative effects of gambling. Online gambling, where age restrictions are more difficult to enforce, can pose a greater risk of harms than offline gambling. This review summarizes the existing research on online gambling policies relevant to youths aged 25 or under and evaluates their effectiveness.

Most of the 36 studies included in this review came from Western countries. Only three studies specifically examined young people's experiences with gambling regulation. There is a lack of policies targeted at young people, aside from age restrictions. In general, gambling policies were found to be ineffective at reducing illegal online gambling or promoting uptake of safer gambling tools. Moreover, young people are frequently exposed to gambling advertisements, including through sports sponsorship.

After removing duplicates, a total of 5,622 papers were identified from the database search. Of these, 608 papers were retrieved for a full-text review after title and abstract screening. After determining their eligibility, 36 studies were included in the review.

What the researchers found

Of the 36 included studies, 16 focused on the consequences of legalization of online gambling (44.4%); nine examined safer gambling features (25.0%); five examined bans on online gambling (13.9%); four studied advertising restrictions (11.1%);

and one each examined prohibition of in-play betting and safer gambling education (2.8%).

Most studies took place in Western countries, including Spain, Sweden, Australia, France, the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Finland, Germany, Israel, Norway, and Switzerland. Two studies took place in India and Indonesia, while two other studies were international in nature. Please see the original article for a breakdown of legislations, policies, and regulations for each individual country.

Only three studies specifically looked at young people's experiences with gambling regulation. There is a lack of policies targeted at youths, aside from age restrictions. But even with age restrictions, many young people can find ways to gamble.

Countries typically either prohibit online gambling or legalize online gambling through a licensing system. Legalization tends to not have an effect on reducing illegal online gambling. This may be because many people who use illegal websites to gamble do not make the transition to licensed operators. Legalization also leads to increased gambling participation and harms. Notwithstanding, legalization may help direct people new to gambling to licensed operators.

Gambling operators often implement safer gambling features (such as time limits and deposit limits) when required by law. But these tools are not given visual prominence on gambling sites. When using safer gambling tools is voluntary, uptake is low even when people are aware of their existence. The voluntary nature of these tools means that the burden is on people who gamble to protect themselves from gambling harms.

Gambling advertisement regulations are generally lax in most countries. Many youths are exposed to gambling advertisements in public spaces and in the context of sports.

How you can use this research

This review highlights the need for more research into gambling policies and regulations targeted at youths. Additionally, this review suggests that many current policies are inefficient at reducing illegal online gambling and promoting safer gambling.

About the researchers

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About Greo Evidence Insights

Greo Evidence Insights is an independent, non-profit organization specializing in research, knowledge mobilization, and evaluation in the health and well-being sectors. Greo transforms research and insights into actionable strategies to prevent and reduce harm related to gambling, gaming, technology use, and substance use. To learn more about funding for Research Snapshots visit [our website](#).

