

knowledge snapshot



Gambling should be considered a public health issue in Wales, United Kingdom

What this article is about

This article reviews evidence about gambling in Wales, United Kingdom (UK) and determines whether or not gambling should be considered a public health issue in Wales. Gambling is an activity where people bet money on games of chance in the hope that they will win more money. It is generally accepted as a normal pastime in the UK.

Gambling has positive and negative consequences. The UK government uses the taxes it collects from gambling operators to fund programs and services that can benefit residents. However, some people are harmed by gambling and develop problem gambling (PG). PG is repetitive gambling behaviour that leads to negative consequences. Some forms of gambling, such as online gambling and gambling machines, are more likely to cause harm than other forms.

In this article, the authors review the latest research to explore gambling in Wales to determine if gambling should be considered a public health issue.

What was done?

The authors searched several databases to find published research about gambling in Wales. They also reviewed data sets that were available to the public. Academic researchers from the gambling field were contacted to help find the latest articles and data sources. The authors reviewed 71 articles in total that were published between January 2014 and March 2017.

The authors considered four key areas when assessing whether gambling is a public health issue in Wales. These areas are the cost of gambling to society, if gambling problems are preventable, if vulnerable

Why is this article important?

In this review, the authors explore gambling in Wales, United Kingdom (UK) and identify whether it is a public health issue or not. They reviewed research articles and publicly available information. The authors suggest that gambling should be considered a public health issue in Wales. About three in five adults in Wales had gambled in the past year. About 1% of the population have problem gambling. Gambling problems cost Wales a lot of money, and have greater effects on vulnerable people, including low-income people and children. There is a need for prevention programs at a population level to address this public health issue in Wales.

groups (i.e., children and people with low-income) are harmed more by gambling than other groups, and if gambling prevention programs are needed to prevent PG at a population level. Population level programs focus on the broader social context and are designed to benefit an entire population of people.

What you need to know

About three in five adults in Wales gambled in the past year. About 1 in 100 people in Wales have problem gambling (PG). People with PG are more likely to have mental health problems, to be admitted to the hospital, and to seek counselling services than people without PG. According to a report by the Institute for Public Policy Research in 2016, the negative consequences of gambling cost Wales between £40 to £70 million a year.

Gambling harm not only affects the individual, but also family, friends, and the community. There is a lack of research about whether gambling prevention programs change people's gambling behaviour. Research suggests that restricting access to gambling activities, reducing high risk forms of gambling, setting time and spending limits, and not allowing people to drink alcohol while gambling may prevent harm. Many not-for-profit and voluntary organizations in Wales are working to treat people with PG.

Research in the UK shows that there are more gambling machines located in poorer communities. People with lower incomes in Wales are more likely to suffer from PG than people with higher incomes. They also tend to spend more money on gambling. A higher proportion of youth report suffering from PG or being at risk of PG compared to adults. Youth may be more easily influenced by gambling advertisements. They spend more time online and are likely to be exposed to gambling advertising through social media.

Online betting is a popular form of gambling in the UK. Almost 1 in 10 people in Wales who gamble online suffer from PG. Research suggests that gambling prevention programs that are delivered to everyone in a population instead of individual people could be more effective at reducing gambling harm.

Based on these findings, the authors suggest that gambling should be considered a public health issue in Wales, UK. There is a need for co-ordinated interventions at a population level to tackle the issue.

Who is it intended for?

Policy makers could use this research to consider putting more regulations in place that protect the public from gambling harm. These regulations could include placing gambling venues farther away from banking machines, restricting the hours that venues are open, and reducing the number of online advertisements. Policy makers could also require gambling operators to explain how they will protect vulnerable people from gambling harm before they are licensed.

Prevention service providers could create gambling prevention programs that are delivered at a population level. They could reframe responsible gambling messages, which often place the burden on the individual to gamble responsibly. Doing so might reduce the shame people feel about their gambling behaviour. For example, they could tell the public that gambling behaviour is affected by a person's environment. By reducing shame, more people with PG might be willing to seek help. More research is needed to determine whether online gaming activities (e.g., video games with gambling elements) make gambling seem like a normal pastime.

About the researchers

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Citation

Atherton, A., & Beynon, C. (2018). Is gambling an emerging public health issue for Wales, UK? *Journal of Public Health*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1093/pubmed/fdv164>

Gambling Research Exchange Ontario (GREO)

Gambling Research Exchange Ontario (GREO) has partnered with the Knowledge Mobilization Unit at York University to produce Research Snapshots. GREO is an independent knowledge translation and exchange organization that aims to eliminate harm from gambling. Our goal is to support evidence-informed decision making in responsible gambling policies, standards, and practices. The work we do is intended for researchers, policy makers, gambling regulators and operators, and treatment and prevention service providers.

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