

# research snapshot

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## The mental health costs of gambling in England and Scotland

### What this research is about

An increase in the number of gambling venues and online gambling sites has led to an increase in gambling in many countries. It has been estimated that about 75% of British adults gamble each year. Because of gambling's popularity, it is important to understand the relationship between gambling and mental health costs. Depression is known to be very common among people with gambling problems.

Many past studies have examined the association between gambling and depression among clinical patients, but not in the general population. The current study examined the relationship between gambling and depression among the British population. It also explored the impact of the gambling environment (in-venue versus online) on depression. Online gambling may pose a greater risk to mental health since it is done in private and lacks the social aspects of in-venue gambling.

### What the researchers did

The researchers used data from the 2012 Health Survey for England (HSE) and the 2012 Scottish Health Survey (SHeS). The HSE is an annual survey on health and lifestyle of people living in England. The SHeS provides information about the health of people living in Scotland. In 2012, both surveys captured information on gambling behaviour among adults aged 16 years and over.

To measure depression, the researchers used responses to the question: "Have you recently been feeling unhappy and depressed?" To measure gambling, they used responses to two gambling addiction measures. The DSM-IV scale is used for the clinical diagnosis of pathological gambling. It

### What you need to know

The findings of the present study suggest that gambling has significant emotional and mental health costs in England and Scotland. The present study found that gambling was related to higher levels of depression. People with more severe gambling problems tended to be more depressed. Furthermore, the impact of gambling on depression was influenced by the environment in which a person gambled. Online gambling posed a greater mental health risk compared to gambling in venues or outlets.

categorizes people as non-gamblers, social gamblers, at-risk gamblers, or pathological gamblers. The Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI) focuses on the harm and consequences of gambling. It categorizes people as non-problem gamblers, low-risk gamblers, moderate-risk gamblers, and problem gamblers. In contrast to the DSM-IV scale, the PGSI has been developed for use in population-based studies. Thus, it can capture gambling problems among people without a clinical diagnosis.

The researchers analyzed the impact of gambling (as measured by the DSM-IV and PGSI) on depression. They also analyzed the impact of the severity of problem gambling on depression. Finally, they analyzed the impact of the gambling environment (online or in-venue) on depression.

### What the researchers found

Individuals with higher scores on the DSM-IV scale had higher levels of depression. Similarly, individuals with higher scores on the PGSI had higher levels of

depression. These results suggested that individuals with more severe gambling problems tended to be more depressed than those with less severe problems.

Based on the DSM-IV scale, the researchers classified social gamblers as 'low-harm' gamblers, and at-risk or pathological gamblers as 'high-harm' gamblers. Based on the PGSI, the researchers considered low-risk gamblers to be 'low-harm' gamblers, and moderate-risk and problem gamblers to be 'high-harm' gamblers. Overall, both types of gambler (low-harm and high-harm) suffered from depression. However, the impact of high-harm gambling on depression was stronger. These results suggested that as individuals moved from social gambling to pathological gambling, or from low-risk gambling to problem gambling, the impact of their gambling on depression increased.

Individuals who gambled online within the last 12 months reported higher levels of depression than those who gambled in venues. This result suggested that the privacy of online gambling could lead to more negative mental health impact on gamblers.

#### How you can use this research

This study shows that policy-makers should develop stricter public health policies to regulate the fast growing online gambling, given its additional negative impact on mental health. Public health also should provide education to raise public awareness of the link between gambling behaviours and depression. In particular, there is a need to raise awareness of the risk associated with subclinical levels of gambling. Clinicians and treatment providers should offer mental health support to their clients who have gambling problems.

#### About the researchers

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#### Keywords

Gambling, depression, mental health

#### 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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