



## Social capital decreases the risk of problem gambling

### What this research is about

Gambling is very popular in Australia. On average, an adult in Australia spent \$1240 on gambling in 2014-2015. Many people who gamble may not experience harm from gambling. However, some people can develop problem gambling. Problem gambling is when someone's gambling habits harm them or those around them. Problem gambling can be difficult to treat. Furthermore, few people with problem gambling actually seek help.

The environment one lives in can affect gambling behaviour. For example, the gambling habits of parents or peers can affect a person's gambling behaviour. Social capital could also affect their gambling behaviour. Social capital is the amount of resources that someone can access when they need support. These resources are available to them because they are a member of a community or group. Such resources can include mental, emotional, and/or financial support. If one has more support from their community, they may be less likely to develop problem gambling. Thus, this study tested for the impact of social capital on gambling behaviour.

### What the researchers did

The researchers used data from the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey. The HILDA survey is a representative sample of the Australian population. Close to 20,000 people participate in the survey each year. It collects information about household demographics and economic characteristics. For example, it asks people for their age, gender, marital status, income level, etc. The survey started in 2001, and the 15<sup>th</sup> survey (in

### What you need to know

Gambling is very popular in Australia. However, some people who gamble may experience gambling-related harms. Therefore, it is important to understand what factors affect gambling behaviour. This study looked at how social capital affects gambling behaviour. Social capital is the amount of support that someone can get from their social groups and community. It includes things like emotional support and financial support.

The researchers used data from an Australian national survey to measure people's social capital and gambling behaviour. They found that people with higher social capital were less likely to experience harm from gambling. They also spent less money on gambling and gambled less often than people with lower social capital. Therefore, having higher social capital may reduce the risk of problem gambling.

2015) was the first to include questions about gambling.

### Gambling Behaviour

The HILDA survey asks participants about their gambling activities. It asks how often they gambled and how much money they spent on gambling in the past year. It also includes the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI). The PGSI has nine questions that measure problem gambling behaviour in the past year. Scores range from 0 to 27, where higher scores mean greater problem gambling. For this study, participants were put into four groups based on their PGSI scores:

- i) Non-problem gambling (score 0)
- ii) Low-risk gambling (scores 1-2)
- iii) Moderate-risk gambling (scores 3-7)
- iv) Problem gambling (scores 8-27)

## Social Capital

The researchers used different sections of the HILDA survey to measure three aspects of social capital.

- i) Social cohesion and networking in the community (e.g., How often do neighbours help each other out? Do you trust your neighbours?)
- ii) Support received from family and friends (e.g., Can you get help from others when you need it? Do you have someone to confide in?)
- iii) Level of interaction and social contact with others (e.g., Do you often visit with others?)

For all three aspects, higher scores mean higher social capital.

The researchers used the social capital information from surveys 1 to 14, and gambling information from survey 15. They looked for the links between people's social capital scores and their gambling risk scores.

## **What the researchers found**

Participants with higher scores for social capital generally had lower PGSI scores. This means people with more social capital were at lower risk of problem gambling. Additionally, participants with higher social capital were more likely to be in the non-problem gambling category (i.e., score of 0 on the PGSI). The same pattern was found with the other gambling questions. Participants with higher social capital spent less money on gambling (relative to their income). They also participated in fewer gambling activities.

The researchers also looked at the links between gambling behaviour and other demographic factors. They found that men were at higher risk of problem gambling than women. People who were single or divorced were at higher risk than married people. People with higher levels of income and education were at lower risk, while people who lived in urban areas and drank more alcohol were at higher risk. However, the effect of social capital on gambling behaviour was stronger than the effects of any of the

demographic factors. Therefore, social capital seems to have a strong effect on gambling behaviour.

## **How you can use this research**

These results suggest that people with more social capital are less at risk of problem gambling. This means that policies that help bring communities together could reduce harms from gambling. For example, policies could create community resources that give people ways to make social connections other than gambling. These resources could help increase people's social capital. As a result, they may be less likely to turn to gambling when they need support.

## **About the researchers**

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