

research snapshot

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Regular participation in certain forms of gambling is closely associated with problem gambling

What this research is about

Many forms of gambling are now being offered in venue and online. Popular gambling forms include lotteries, sports and horse betting, bingo, electronic gaming machines (EGMs), and casino table games. Many research studies suggest that some gambling forms, such as EGMs, are more likely to be associated with problem gambling. Problem gambling occurs when people continue to gamble excessively despite the negative consequences. But, recent research studies suggest that engaging in many different forms of gambling has a stronger effect than engaging in any one specific type of game. It could be that people who play multiple gambling forms spend more money and time gambling. Thus, they are more likely to develop problem gambling. In this study, the researchers examined the associations between problem gambling, specific forms of gambling, and involvement in multiple forms of gambling.

What the researchers did

The researchers used data from the first survey (wave one) of the Swedish Longitudinal Gambling Study (Swelogs). The Swelogs is a large population study of health and gambling in Sweden. The first survey occurred in 2008/2009 and collected data from more than 8,000 persons aged 16 to 84 years.

The researchers focused their analysis on 4,991 participants who reported gambling in the past 12 months on at least one of the eight major forms of gambling. These included lotteries, number games (such as lotto), sports betting, horse betting, poker, EGMs, casino games, and bingo.

Participants completed the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI), which assessed their gambling

What you need to know

In this study, the researchers examined data from a large population study in Sweden. Participants were 4,991 respondents who reported gambling in the past 12 months. The results showed that some forms of gambling were more closely associated with problem gambling. These included electronic gaming machines (EGMs), casino games, bingo and poker. People with problem gambling spent more time and money gambling. They were also more likely to play multiple forms of gambling. However, about 40% of those participants gambled regularly on only one gambling form. Thus, gambling regularly on a specific form of gambling might be the source of harm for many people with problem gambling. Participants who gambled regularly on EGMs were most likely to have problem gambling, regardless of whether they engaged in additional gambling forms. For most other gambling forms, the risk of problem gambling increased if people also engaged in additional gambling forms.

behaviour and problems. There were 142 participants who scored five or higher, and were considered to have problem gambling. This represented about 1.5% of the total number of participants. For gambling involvement, participants reported the number of gambling forms they had played in the past 12 months. For gambling intensity, participants reported the amount of money and time they spent gambling.

The researchers examined if some forms of gambling were more closely associated with problem gambling. They looked at how gambling involvement was linked to gambling intensity and problem gambling. Finally,

the researchers examined if regularly engaging in some forms of gambling influenced the link between gambling involvement and problem gambling.

What the researchers found

There were more participants with problem gambling among those who played EGMs, casino games, bingo and poker. This was observed for both past-year gambling and regular gambling (monthly or more often). The rates of problem gambling were two to four times higher among regular gamblers than past-year gamblers who gambled less often. These results show that some forms of gambling are more closely associated with problem gambling. Also, people with problem gambling tend to gamble more frequently.

High gambling involvement was associated with greater gambling intensity and problem gambling. In other words, participants with problem gambling spent more money and time gambling, and were more likely to play multiple forms of gambling. However, about 40% of participants with problem gambling engaged regularly in only one form of gambling. Another 10% engaged regularly in two forms of gambling. Only 25% gambled on four or more forms of gambling. On average, participants with problem gambling regularly engaged in about two forms of gambling. These results suggest that a specific form of gambling is the source of harm for many people with problem gambling.

Regular participation in some forms of gambling influenced the link between gambling involvement and problem gambling. Participants who gambled regularly on EGMs were most likely to have problem gambling, regardless if they also engaged in additional forms of gambling. For most other forms of gambling, the risk of problem gambling increased if participants also engaged regularly in additional forms of gambling. Participants who bet on horse racing were the least likely to have a gambling problem, unless they also gambled regularly on three or more additional forms of gambling.

How you can use this research

This study can be used to inform public health, gambling regulation, and future research. For

example, public health and gambling regulators may want to focus their efforts on forms of gambling that are more closely associated with problem gambling. Future research may want to investigate if differences exist when gambling in venue versus online, and when gambling on 'rapid' versus 'slow' forms of gambling.

About the researchers

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About Gambling Research Exchange (GREO)

Gambling Research Exchange (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 safer 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.

Learn more about GREO by visiting greo.ca or emailing info@greo.ca.

