

# research snapshot

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## Non-problem gambling may have positive effects on wellbeing

### What this research is about

Evidence suggests that gambling can lead to both negative and positive effects on health and wellbeing. Most research to date has focused on the negative effects of problem gambling. Problem gambling occurs when people have difficulty controlling the amount of time and money spent on gambling and experience harms as a consequence. Aside from people with problem gambling, people with low-risk and moderate-risk gambling also experience harms.

Few studies have explored the positive effects of non-problem gambling. Some studies show that people who gamble recreationally without problems may be happier and have better quality of life than non-gamblers. The current research examined how gambling participation and problem gambling affect wellbeing. The first study compared wellbeing among gamblers with different risk levels (i.e., non-problem, low-risk, moderate risk, and problem gambling). The second study compared wellbeing between gamblers and non-gamblers.

### What the researchers did

In the first study, the researchers recruited 1524 Australian adults over the age of 18. Participants all had gambled in the past six months. They completed an online survey with the following questionnaires:

- 1) The Consumption Screen for Problem Gambling (CSPG) was used to assess how often participants gambled and the amount of time they spent gambling during a typical gambling day. Participants were then grouped as high consumption versus low consumption gamblers.

### What you need to know

This research aimed to distinguish the effects of gambling participation and problem gambling on wellbeing. In the first study, the researchers compared wellbeing among gamblers at different risk levels. The results showed that participants who gambled more often had better wellbeing. Nonetheless, wellbeing declined with more severe gambling problems. Participants who had no gambling problems reported the highest wellbeing, followed by those with low-risk and moderate-risk. Participants with problem gambling had the worst wellbeing. The second study compared wellbeing between gamblers and non-gamblers. The results showed that in the absence of gambling problems, gamblers had better wellbeing than non-gamblers. This was observed for both participants who gambled often and those who gambled less often.

- 2) The Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI) was used to assess gambling risk. Participants were categorized into four groups: non-problem, low-risk, moderate-risk, and problem gambling.
- 3) A Personal Wellbeing Index (PWI) was used to assess life satisfaction in various domains, including health, relationships, and achievement.

The second study involved 1586 Australian adults between the ages of 18 and 50. People older than 50 were excluded due to potential effects of aging on wellbeing. Similar to study 1, participants completed an online survey that included the CSPG, PGSI, and PWI. However, participants with moderate-risk and

problem gambling were merged into one group since there were few participants in these two categories.

### What the researchers found

#### Study 1

Within each gambling risk category, participants who gambled more often (high consumption) had better wellbeing. However, wellbeing declined with more severe gambling problems. In other words, participants who gambled without problems reported the highest wellbeing. This was followed by participants with low-risk and moderate-risk gambling. Participants with problem gambling had the worst wellbeing. These results remained consistent after taking into account age, gender, marital status, education, employment, and income.

From a population perspective, most of the negative impact on wellbeing was due to low- and moderate-risk gambling rather than problem gambling. While participants with problem gambling experienced more harms and had the worst wellbeing, only a small number of participants were in that category. The bulk of impact on wellbeing at a population level was due to a large number of participants with lower risk gambling.

#### Study 2

Participants who gambled without problems had better wellbeing than participants who were non-gamblers. This was observed regardless if they were low or high consumption gamblers. The result also remained consistent after taking into account age, gender, marital status, education, employment, and income.

### How you can use this research

This research provides insights into the relationship between gambling and wellbeing. Gambling regulators and policy-makers could use this research to develop regulations that ensure people can enjoy the benefits of gambling without being at risk for problem gambling. Future research could explore factors that may have an impact on the relationship between gambling and wellbeing. For example,

people with more financial and social resources may be able to gamble frequently and still have better wellbeing.

### About the researchers

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### Gambling Research Exchange (GREO)

Gambling Research Exchange 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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