

research snapshot

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Gambling on licensed sites is associated with less harm than gambling on unlicensed sites

What this research is about

Online gambling has expanded rapidly in many countries. France's online gambling market is one of the largest in Europe. Evidence suggests that people who gamble online are more likely to gamble intensely and to experience problems from gambling. In 2010, France adopted a law to regulate online gambling. With the new law, licensed sites must promote responsible gambling and offer preventive tools to people who gamble excessively.

It is suggested that gambling on licensed sites would provide more protection than gambling on unlicensed sites. However, there is a lack of research to support this assumption. The current study aimed to fill this research gap by comparing gambling patterns and gambling-related problems of people who gambled on licensed versus unlicensed sites.

What the researchers did

The researchers used data from a 2012 survey targeted to Internet users in France. Participants were recruited to be representative of the general population of French Internet users. For this study, the researchers examined data from 3860 participants who had gambled online in the past year. All participants were at least 18 years old.

In the survey, participants reported how frequently they gambled and how much they spent on gambling activities in the past year. They also reported any offline gambling activities. Participants completed the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI), which had been adapted to be about online gambling. The PGSI was used to assess problem gambling behaviours and consequences. Participants also reported any negative impacts on their lifestyle due to gambling (e.g., sleep

What you need to know

This study compared French online gamblers who gambled on licensed sites only to those who gambled on unlicensed sites as well. Participants were 3860 adults who completed an online survey. Almost half of the participants reported gambling on unlicensed sites. People who gambled on unlicensed sites were more likely to be female, be younger in age, and have lower education. They were less likely to hold a job and more likely to experience difficult financial situations. Gambling on unlicensed sites was associated with more frequent gambling and more gambling-related problems. This was found across many gambling activities with legal options in France, with the exception of poker.

problems, unhealthy eating, and relationship problems). Additionally, they reported any change in their alcohol, tobacco, and drug use.

To determine the regulatory status of gambling sites, participants were asked to indicate:

- 1) if the domain name extension of the sites they used ended with '.fr' or '.com'. Licensed sites only have an '.fr' extension.
- 2) if they had to provide a proof of identity. Licensed sites require proof of identity for registration.
- 3) the names of the sites they visited the most.

The researchers categorized participants into two groups based on their responses: 'those who gambled exclusively on licensed sites' and 'those who gambled partly or totally on unlicensed sites'.

Participants also reported their sociodemographic information and their financial situation. The researchers created three categories for financial situation: 'comfortable', 'just enough', and 'difficult'.

What the researchers found

About a quarter of participants gambled online only, while the rest also gambled offline. Slightly over half (53.7%) gambled exclusively on licensed sites. The rest (46.3%) gambled on at least one unlicensed site.

The most popular online gambling activity was playing lottery, instant win and scratch cards. This was followed by poker, horse racing, and sports betting. All these four gambling activities are regulated in France and are offered on licensed sites. More lottery gamblers used licensed sites only. In contrast, more poker players gambled on unlicensed sites than on licensed sites only. Additionally, one in ten participants reported gambling on slot machines or casino games other than poker. These two gambling activities are available only on unlicensed sites.

Compared to those who gambled on licensed sites only, participants who gambled on unlicensed sites were more likely to be female, be younger in age, and have lower education. They were less likely to hold a job and more likely to describe their financial situation as being difficult. Participants who gambled on unlicensed sites were more likely to gamble frequently, to spend more money on gambling, and to experience problem gambling. They were also more likely to report negative impacts of gambling on their lifestyle and an increase in tobacco use.

For many regulated gambling activities with legal options, gambling on unlicensed sites was associated with more gambling-related problems. Poker was the only exception. Poker players who gambled on licensed sites were more likely to gamble frequently and to increase their alcohol use. They were just as likely to experience gambling-related problems as those who gambled on unlicensed sites.

How you can use this research

This study shows that gambling on licensed sites is associated with less harm overall, with the exception

of poker. These findings could be used to inform policies, interventions, and research. Future research could expand on this study to gain a more complete picture of the impacts of licensing and regulation.

About the researchers

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Citation

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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.

