

knowledge snapshot



A review of research using behavioural data provided by gambling operators

What this article is about

Most gambling-related research studies are based on self-report and survey-based methods. In such studies, people answer a series of questions about their gambling behaviours. Although this type of research is insightful and helpful, it has several limitations. For example, evidence suggests that people are unlikely to correctly estimate their gambling behaviours (e.g., how much money or time they spent gambling).

More recent studies have used behavioural data provided by gambling operators. This type of data includes sign-up information (e.g., demographics) when opening an online gambling account, amount and frequency of deposits, records of money spent or lost, and time spent gambling. There are several benefits to analyzing such objective data. First, it can help gambling operators, regulators, and policy makers to identify risky gambling behaviours. Second, it can help identify which gambling activities or features of gambling activities that are associated with a greater risk of harm. Third, it can help monitor engagement with responsible gaming tools. In this article, the researchers aimed to examine the progress of research involving the use of objective gambling data over the past 15 years.

What was done?

The researchers searched for relevant studies using Scopus. They used the keywords “online/Internet” and “gambling/wagering/sports-betting”. The researchers also looked for relevant studies through Google searches using the same keywords. In addition, they searched the websites of major funding bodies and references cited in previously published

Why is this article important?

This article provides a comprehensive review of the use of objective behavioural data provided by gambling operators in research in the past 15 years. The researchers reviewed 58 studies. The review suggests significant progress in research involving objective gambling data, such as the development of behavioural markers that can distinguish people at higher risk of harm. The findings also highlight various gaps in current research. Few studies have combined objective behavioural data with self-report data to achieve robust statistical results. Additionally, there is a need for further research on how objective gambling data can be used to identify higher-risk gambling products and monitor gambling harms.

papers. To be included in this review, studies had to be published in English and involve objective online behavioural data. The researchers identified 56 peer-reviewed articles and two reports.

What you need to know

Of the 58 studies, 78% focused on the individual’s risk. About 21% discussed both individual risk and product risk. Only one study focused on the risk of gambling products.

Some studies included proxy measures of harm. These studies examined whether certain factors were related to gambling outcomes associated with a higher risk of harm. Four main outcomes were examined as proxy measures of harm: (1) closure of online gambling accounts; (2) use of responsible gambling measures; (3) setting higher gambling limits;

and (4) exceeding low-risk gambling limits previously set for land-based gambling.

Six studies included both objective gambling data and self-report measures, such as the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI). These studies compared the risk categories derived from objective gambling data to the self-report measures. A few studies examined the success of responsible gambling interventions. These included the effects of voluntary or mandatory gambling limits and the effects of pop-up messages.

A range of behavioural markers had been examined as indicators of greater risk of harm. Gambling intensity (i.e., the amount people gamble), including frequency, spending, duration, and speed, was one of the most measured aspects. A second category of behavioural markers was related to the amount of money deposited or withdrawn from gambling accounts. A third category was related to dynamic changes in gambling behaviours (e.g., increasing bets after losses). However, the results were mixed regarding this category. The other categories included time of day people gamble (e.g., gambling late at night); activities that reflect realizing one has a gambling problem (e.g., account closure); and engaging with a wider range of gambling products or riskier products.

The results of this review suggest that high gambling spending only occurs in a small percentage of people who gamble. Although most people lose money while gambling, they often do not spend large amounts. Also, objective gambling data can be used to identify people who gamble at high risk. There are important markers of higher-risk gambling that are observable over time.

The researchers also identified several gaps in current research. For example, few studies have combined objective gambling data with self-report data to achieve robust statistical results. The range of behavioural markers used to identify people at higher risk of gambling harms should be expanded and standardized. There is also a need for further research on how objective gambling data can be used to identify higher-risk gambling products and monitor gambling harms.

Who is it intended for?

This research is intended for gambling researchers, operators, regulators, and policy makers. The findings can help inform the development of risk detection, intervention, and treatment methods for the gambling industry.

About the researchers

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