

research snapshot

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The effect of gender and availability of gambling opportunities on the probability of starting to gamble

What this research is about

The decision to start gambling can be partly explained by time inconsistent preferences. This theoretical framework suggests that a person who does not gamble may plan not to gamble in the future. But they may still decide to gamble in the current period. This is called having inconsistent preferences.

Regulatory and institutional changes can influence the likelihood of whether people start to gamble. For example, lowering the benefits of starting to gamble will increase the likelihood that people will overcome their inconsistent preferences and, consequently, not gamble. But any actions that make it easier to start gambling will make such inconsistent preferences more likely.

The gambling market in Spain has seen a dramatic increase over the past few decades. Before 1977, legal gambling was limited to football pools, the national lottery, and charity lottery. But there has been a dramatic expansion of gambling opportunities since then due to regulatory changes. The purpose of this study was to analyze how the availability of gambling opportunities influence the inclination to start gambling. The researchers paid particular attention to gender differences.

What the researchers did

The researchers used data from the 2015 gambling prevalence survey "Study on prevalence, behavior and characteristics of gambling users in Spain." This dataset was collected by the Dirección General de Ordenación del Juego as part of a nationally representative survey of the Spanish population. The dataset included information about 6,816 people aged 18 and over. Participants answered a survey

What you need to know

Participation in gambling is influenced by individual characteristics that affect people's willingness to gamble. The availability of and exposure to gambling opportunities can also influence gambling participation. This study analyzed how individual factors and availability of gambling opportunities influence the probability of starting to gamble. The researchers used data on 5,956 adults collected through a 2015 gambling prevalence survey in Spain.

The researchers analyzed the findings across three time periods that marked successive expansion of legal gambling availability in Spain. They found that younger generations had a higher probability of starting to gamble. Those with higher education levels were more likely to start gambling than those with lower or no educational levels. There were also gender differences in the inclination to start gambling. Men started gambling at an earlier age than women. Both men and women were more likely to start gambling than before. But the likelihood of starting to gamble increased more for women than men over the three time periods.

about their sociodemographic (e.g., age, education) and gambling characteristics through personal interviews. A total of 860 participants' answers were removed because they did not respond to key variables (e.g., age when they started gambling). The final sample included 5,956 participants.

The researchers calculated the spell length (in years) for each participant. The spell length was the number of years that people did not gamble until when they

first gambled, minus 13. The researchers subtracted 13 years because statistics showed that many people began to gamble at the age of 14.

The researchers used a split population duration model to examine how time effects that were linked to changes in regulation influenced the probability of starting to gamble. The researchers examined each of the following periods: from 1977 to 1985, from 1986 to 2010, and 2011 onwards. Each of these three time periods witnessed major changes in gambling legislation in Spain. These time periods reflected the successive expansion and availability of gambling opportunities in Spain over time.

What the researchers found

On average, participants were 47 years old. About half were women (52%). Most participants (73%) gambled at least once in their lifetime, and most of whom (90%) did so in the previous year. On average, those who reported gambling began to gamble when they were 23 years. Their average spell length of not gambling was about 10 years.

Younger generations had a higher probability of starting to gamble. Those with higher education levels were more likely to start gambling than those with lower or no educational levels.

Using data on the GDP per capita growth rate for each of the three time periods, the researchers found that higher growth rates had a negative effect on the inclination to start gambling. But it was a weak relationship.

Men started gambling earlier than women. But the spell length narrowed for each successive time period. For example, in 1977, 75% of men took 15 years to start gambling. But after 2011, it took less than 10 years. The spell length decreased even more rapidly for women with every time period.

Over time, the likelihood of starting to gamble increased more for women than men. But the likelihood of starting to gamble was still lower for women than it was for men. The researchers also found that the highest risk of starting to gamble was around 24 years old. Then, the risk decreased over

time slowly. At the 35-year mark, the risk of gambling remained constant for several years. It then decreased to zero at around the 60-year mark.

How you can use this research

This research can help regulators better understand gambling behaviours amongst subgroups and identify ways to improve gambling regulations.

About the researchers

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