

# research snapshot

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## The impact of modes of access and specific gambling activities on problem gambling and distress

### What this research is about

Internet gambling has become widely available in many countries. Some studies have found that rates of gambling problems among people who gamble online are higher than those who gamble in land-based venues. Other studies did not find higher rates. This inconsistency might be because several studies looked at internet gambling as a specific gambling activity. However, internet gambling should be viewed as a mode of access. Moreover, many people who gamble online also gamble in venue. It is essential to account for overall gambling when examining the impact of any single activity.

Some gambling activities may be more problematic than others. In particular, electronic gaming machines (EGMs) are most commonly reported by people who seek treatment for gambling problems. This study examined the impact of modes of access (i.e., internet vs. venue gambling) and specific gambling activities, on problem gambling and psychological distress. The latter refers to negative feelings and emotions, that can affect a person's life and functioning.

### What the researchers did

The researchers recruited participants through a market research company. Participants were 998 Australian adults (57% male) who reported to have gambled online in the past 30 days. Participants completed an online survey:

- Gambling frequency – participants were asked how often they had gambled online and in venue in the past four weeks, on specific gambling activities: lotteries, EGMs, sports betting, esports betting, race wagering, poker, casino games.

### What you need to know

Internet and land-based venue gambling are two modes of access that may have different impacts on gamblers. Some gambling activities, like electronic gaming machines (EGMs), are thought to have a stronger relationship with gambling problems than other activities. This study investigated the impact of modes of access and specific gambling activities on problem gambling and distress. Participants were 998 Australians who gambled online. In general, people who gambled more frequently and gambled on more activities, had more gambling problems. Controlling for overall gambling involvement, online and venue-based EGMs were significantly linked to gambling problems. Venue-based sports betting was also significantly linked with gambling problems. Venue gambling on EGMs, sports betting, and casino card/table games were associated with greater psychological distress.

- The Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI) was used to assess how severe participants' gambling problems were.
- The Kessler 6 (K6) scale was used to assess the level of psychological distress in the past four weeks (e.g., nervousness, feelings of worthlessness, hopelessness, and depression).
- Demographics: age, gender, household income, etc.

The researchers calculated the breadth of online and venue gambling involvement for each participant. Breadth of involvement was based on the total

number of online/venue activities that participants had played at least once in the past 30 days.

### What the researchers found

About three-quarters of participants had gambled online on lotteries. About half had gambled online on sports betting and race wagering. Two in five participants had gambled online on EGMs. In terms of venue gambling, about half had gambled on lotteries and EGMs. One-third had gambled in venue on sports betting and race wagering. Participants who gambled online on an activity were also likely to gamble on the same activity in venue.

Participants who gambled online more frequently on any gambling activity reported more gambling problems. The same was observed for venue gambling frequency. However, certain gambling activities were stronger predictors of problem gambling and psychological distress when accounting for overall gambling involvement. Specifically, EGM gambling either online or in venue was associated with more gambling problems. Venue gambling on EGMs, sports betting, and casino card/table games were associated with greater distress. Sports betting in venue was also associated with more gambling problems.

For both online and venue gambling, the breadth of involvement was associated with problem gambling severity. That is, participants who gambled on more activities online or in venue had more gambling problems. The breadth of gambling involvement was not consistently associated with distress. In particular, the number of activities played, either online or in venue, was not associated with distress after taking into account how often participants played EGMs and casino games.

In terms of demographics, participants of older age reported fewer gambling problems, and less distress. Those with lower income reported more gambling problems than those with higher income. Participants of South-East, East, or South Asian background reported more gambling problems than those of European background.

### How you can use this research

This study could be useful to public health and intervention providers. It shows that specific gambling activities, like EGMs, sports betting, and casino games, warrant attention to address their negative impacts. Interventions could also target subgroups that are at higher risk (e.g., younger adults with lower income).

### 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](http://greo.ca) or emailing [info@greo.ca](mailto:info@greo.ca).

