

knowledge snapshot



Risk and protective factors of online gambling among adults: A systematic review

What this article is about

Online gambling has specific features compared to land-based gambling. For example, online gambling provides easier access to gambling opportunities. It is more convenient and is available 24 hours a day. There is also more chance for interacting with others and gambling continuously. It is also important to know these risk and protective factors to design effective interventions and policies. This article reviews the current research about the risk and protective factors of online gambling among adults.

What was done?

The authors conducted a systematic review in line with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2015 Checklist. They searched three academic databases: PubMed, PsychInfo, and Scopus. This search led to 420 unique papers. The authors then added 12 relevant studies based on the reference lists of selected papers and the suggestions of experts in the gambling field.

To be included in the review, studies had to be peer-reviewed and published in English between 2010 and 2020. The authors set the inclusion criteria according to the Population Intervention Comparison Outcome (PICO) criteria. Studies had to focus on adults who gambled online (age over 18). Studies had to investigate risk factors and/or protective factors at any level (individual and environmental). However, risk and/or protective factors related to biological determinants were excluded. The research outcomes could relate to all degrees of addiction, severity levels, and risk levels of online gaming. Studies were only included if they either compared (1) people who gambled online to those who gambled offline, or (2) people not experiencing problem gambling who

Why is this article important?

This article is a review of current research on the risk and protective factors of online gambling among adults. The authors included 42 studies in this review. The selected studies compared 1) people who gambled online to those who gambled offline, or (2) people experiencing problem gambling who gambled online to those not experiencing problem gambling who gambled online. This review is important because it identifies risk and protective factors. These factors could be incorporated in preventive interventions aimed at people who gamble online.

gambled online to people who experienced problem gambling who gambled online.

The authors first screened the studies by reading the title and abstract. Then, the studies were read in full, and the eligibility criteria were applied. Data were then extracted from the selected studies for analysis. A total of 42 articles were included in this review.

What you need to know

Most of the included studies were from Western countries (Europe, the UK, Australia, Canada, and the USA). Only one study was from Asia (Macau). All studies used a quantitative methodology, with most using online questionnaires. Most studies recruited nonrepresentative samples. Most studies were cross-sectional studies that collected data at only one point in time. Only three longitudinal studies followed participants over a period of 30 days or 2 years.

Sociodemographic factors were among the most studied in both comparisons of online versus offline

gambling and online problem versus nonproblem gambling. Being male and younger was more common among people who gambled online compared to those who gambled offline, as well as among those experiencing problem gambling who gambled online. Having higher education, having higher income, and having a stable partner were more commonly linked to online gambling than offline gambling. But they were less associated with online problem gambling.

Gambling patterns and behaviour were also widely studied. High intensity (more frequent gambling), high variability (gambling on more types of games), and high spending were more common among those who gambled online. They were also risk factors for online problem gambling. People who gambled online were more likely to gamble for longer periods of time and to start gambling at an earlier age. This was also the case for those experiencing problem gambling.

People who gambled online were more likely to misuse substances than those who gambled offline. Substance misuse was also associated with online problem gambling. Few studies examined health and wellbeing. People who gambled offline seemed to engage in more healthy activities, were fitter, and generally felt healthier than those who gambled online. In terms of mental health, people who gambled online and experienced problem gambling were more likely to report psychological distress and anxious or depressive states. In terms of personality, high impulsivity (a tendency to act rashly) and having a dysfunctional personality were more common among those with online problem gambling.

People who gambled offline and those without problem gambling were more likely to gamble for social reasons. Those who gambled online and experienced problem gambling were more likely to gamble for financial reasons. Results for gambling for coping and enhancement reasons were mixed.

Overall, there were more studies focusing on risk factors at the individual level. Protective factors at the relational and contextual levels need to be studied more in the future. Even if people who engage in online and offline gambling share most of the same

risk and protective factors, there are some factors that are not shared. These factors may be important with respect to preventive interventions.

Who is it intended for?

This article is intended for gambling researchers, policy makers, clinicians, and public health staff.

About the researchers

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Citation

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