What this research is about

Gambling is a common activity in Victoria, Australia. It is estimated that between 0.4%-0.8% of people living in Victoria have problem gambling. Problem gambling is defined as repetitive gambling behaviour that leads to negative consequences.

Past research has found that many factors are linked to how often a person gambles and their likelihood of having problem gambling. These factors include the extent to which they approve of gambling, believe that others gamble and approve of gambling, and talk about gambling with others. Also, seeing gambling advertising, certain demographic factors (age, gender, place of birth, etc.), and psychological factors (depression, being impulsive, etc.) have all been linked to gambling.

It is not clear from past research how much these factors predict gambling frequency and problem gambling. Thus, it is not clear which are the most important factors that future research or gambling interventions should focus on. The current study explored a large number of factors to find out their relative importance as predictors of gambling frequency and problem gambling.

What the researchers did

Participants were 3,361 adults living in Victoria, Australia. They were recruited through an online survey panel to complete a survey.

The survey captured many factors that past research had found to be linked with gambling. It asked participants for their demographic characteristics, including age, gender, country of birth, relationship status, and main language spoken at home. It asked how often participants took part in 12 common gambling activities during the past year. It also assessed whether participants’ gambling caused problems using the Canadian Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI).

The survey measured the extent to which participants approved of the 12 gambling activities surveyed. Participants also reported the extent to which they thought that their family and friends gambled and approved of the 12 gambling activities. The survey asked participants how often they had seen advertisements for each of the 12 gambling activities. Participants reported how often they talked about gambling, either online or offline. Finally, the survey measured psychological factors and false beliefs related to gambling. These included depression, low self-esteem, positive urgency (acting rashly when

What you need to know

This study examined a large number of factors that could predict gambling and problem gambling. The results showed that there were several major predictors. For gambling frequency, people gambled more often if they approved of gambling, believed that their family and friends gambled and approved of gambling, discussed gambling offline, and had more gambling problems. There were five major predictors of problem gambling: acting rashly when feeling strong positive feelings (positive urgency); playing poker machines at pubs, hotels or sports bars; online chats about game tables at casinos; gambling on the internet; and believing the chances of winning were higher than what they actually were.
feeling strong positive feelings), overestimating the chances of winning and believing that one was luckier than others.

The researchers analyzed which factors were the major factors that predicted gambling participation and problem gambling.

**What the researchers found**

All of the examined factors were related with participation in at least some forms of gambling. However, participants who discussed gambling both online and offline were most likely to participate in all forms of gambling.

Several factors were strong predictors of how often a person gambled. Participants gambled more often if they approved of gambling more and if they believed that their family members and peers gambled often. Participants also gambled more often if they discussed gambling offline, and if they reported having more gambling problems on the PGSI. Age was found to be an important predictor for certain types of gambling. For instance, older participants were more likely to buy lottery tickets than younger ones.

Because beliefs about others’ gambling and approval of gambling were important predictors of how often participants gambled, the researchers explored them further. They found that participants thought that people gambled more often and approved of gambling more than they themselves did.

Almost all factors were related with problem gambling, except for language spoken at home and relationship status. However, problem gambling could be almost fully explained by five major predictors. These were: acting rashly when feeling strong positive feelings (positive urgency); playing poker machines at pubs, hotels or sports bars; online chats about game tables at casinos; gambling on the internet; and overestimating the chances of winning.

**How you can use this research**

Future work may benefit most from focusing on the major predictors of gambling and problem gambling. Public health could develop education campaigns to correct mistaken beliefs about how often others gamble and approve of gambling. They could also design education campaigns about odds of winning and common false beliefs. Treatment providers could concentrate on reducing and better controlling positive urgency when working with patients with gambling problems. Policy-makers and governments could reduce access to certain gambling activities, (e.g., poker machines).

**About the researchers**

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**Gambling Research Exchange Ontario (GREO)**

Gambling Research Exchange Ontario (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 responsible 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.

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