

# research snapshot

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## Comparing individual and situational factors between online and offline pathological gambling

### What this research is about

Gambling has become a popular activity in Portugal, both online and offline. Nowadays, many people choose to gamble online. Research has suggested that betting online is more likely to lead to gambling problems. In many cases, people who gamble both online and offline have the highest involvement in gambling and higher prevalence of problems.

Many individual and situational factors can contribute to gambling problems. Individual factors include sociodemographic (e.g., age, gender, socioeconomic status) and personality factors (e.g., impulsivity, sensation seeking). Situational factors are external to the gambler, such as availability, accessibility, exposure, and advertisement. Studies have shown that people may prefer online gambling because it is more convenient, comfortable, and anonymous.

There is not enough research that compares online and offline gambling, especially in Portugal. There is also not enough information about the differences between online and offline gamblers who suffer from pathological gambling. Hence, this study sought to compare online and offline pathological gambling in terms of individual and situational characteristics.

### What the researchers did

The researchers recruited 1599 participants aged 16 and older. They developed two surveys, one for those who primarily gambled online and one for those who primarily gambled offline. The first part of the survey asked participants for their demographic information (e.g., age, gender, nationality). It also asked them about their gambling culture (i.e., history of gambling behaviours, types of games played, money and time spent, motivations and consequences of gambling).

### What you need to know

This research compared online and offline gambling in terms of individual and situational factors that may contribute to gambling problems. The researchers compared online and offline gamblers with pathological gambling. Results showed that those who gambled online were more influenced by situational characteristics (e.g., ease of access, convenience). Those who gambled offline had higher scores on individual characteristics. Online gamblers endorsed responsible gambling measures to a greater extent than offline gamblers.

The second part included three main dimensions. First, it asked participants about their individual characteristics and psychosocial symptoms while engaging in offline/online gambling (e.g., depression, anxiety, suicide attempts, use of tobacco, substances, and alcohol). Second, it included questions about their gambling behaviours and attractiveness to online gambling (e.g., situational characteristics, time and money spent in gambling, chasing). Third, it included questions about their attitudes toward responsible gambling measures (e.g., self-exclusion, helplines).

To assess gambling problems, the researchers used the South Oaks Gambling Screen (SOGS, the Portuguese version). This classified participants into three main categories: people without problems who scored 0 out of 20; people with some problems who scored 1–4 (i.e., being at risk); and people with probable pathological gambling who scored 5+. The researchers split the participants into six groups (the three categories along two modes of gambling). In this study, the researchers focused on participants with

probable pathological gambling, including 171 online gamblers (PGON) and 171 offline gamblers (PGOF).

## What the researchers found

The results revealed that demographically, PGON were somewhat different from PGOF. PGON were younger, with almost half of PGON between the ages of 16 and 25. Both groups were mostly comprised of males. PGOF were more likely to have a job, stable relationship, and children. In both groups, the majority had higher education and good income. Both groups were equally satisfied with their relationship. PGON gambled more days per week and were more likely to report an increase in the amount of time and money spent on gambling last year. But, PGOF reported spending more money on gambling.

The most common device used to gamble online was a home computer, followed by laptops and other devices. PGON started to interact with computers at a younger age and were also more likely to gamble alone. PGON preferred poker, sports betting, online video games and social networking games. PGOF preferred slot machines, casino card games, lotteries, and scratch cards. PGOF reported greater feelings of euphoria, escape, and losing time quickly, and had more suicidal thoughts. However, both groups reported similar levels of suicide attempts.

With regards to gambling motivations, both groups reported gambling for money, although PGOF were more likely to play to win money. PGON scored higher on all other motivations (e.g., accessibility, convenience, fun, diversity of games). Thus, situational factors were more attractive to PGON. There were also differences in the endorsement of responsible gambling (RG) measures. Generally, among the online gamblers, those with more severe gambling problems endorsed RG measures to a greater extent. Thus, PGON endorsed RG measures the most. Among the offline gamblers, those with at-risk gambling endorsed RG the most.

## How you can use this research

This research could be used by policy makers, service providers, and researchers. Policy makers could use this information to inform responsible gambling

campaigns for online gambling. Service providers could use this information to develop culturally relevant prevention and treatment programs for gambling-related harm. They could also develop new online treatments for younger groups. Future studies could explore whether differences exist between online and offline gambling in other countries where online gambling is on the rise.

## 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).

