research snapshot

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Gambling for fun may benefit some people's health and well-being

What this research is about

This research explores whether gambling for fun positively affects people's health and well-being. Gambling may benefit some people and harm others. Evidence suggests that gambling for fun, also known as recreational gambling, may increase people's overall happiness and their ability to deal with stress. However, some people become addicted to gambling and developed problem gambling (PG). PG is repetitive gambling behaviour that leads to negative consequences. People with PG may suffer anxiety, depression, and other chronic health conditions like high blood pressure and heart disease.

Many studies have investigated how PG affects people's health. These studies suggest that people who have PG have poorer health than people who do not gamble. Few studies investigate whether recreational gambling affects people's health. In this study, the researchers investigated whether recreational gambling affects overall health and well-being. The researchers also investigated whether recreational gambling affects several chronic health conditions.

What the researchers did

The researchers reviewed data from the Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS). The CCHS collects information from Canadians about their health and how they use health care services. It also collects participants' demographic information such as their age and education level. The researchers analyzed data that were collected in 2002, 2003, 2005, 2007, and 2009. They included only responses from adults who were 18 years of age or older.

What you need to know

In this study, the researchers investigated if recreational gambling, or gambling for fun, affects people's overall health and well-being. They analyzed data from the Canadian Community Health Surveys (CCHS) in 2002, 2003, 2005, 2007, and 2009. Survey participants were 18 years of age or older who lived in Canada. Participants who gambled recreationally had lower stress levels and were more satisfied with their life than people who did not gamble. They were less likely to have some chronic health conditions, specifically strokes and stomach ulcers. However, they were more likely to report having poorer health than people did not gamble. These results suggest that recreational gambling may positively affect some people's health and well-being. Researchers could further investigate the benefits of recreational gambling on people's health and well-being.

The researchers examined survey participants' responses about how healthy they thought they were, if their health changed recently, how much stress they had in their life, and how satisfied they were with life. The researchers also looked at whether participants had high blood pressure, if they suffered a stroke in the past, if they had stomach ulcers, migraines, heart disease, and diabetes.

All provinces and territories in Canada completed a section of the CCHS in 2002 that asked questions about people's gambling behaviour. Only some provinces asked people to complete this gambling module in the years following. The gambling module assessed how often participants gambled. It asked

participants about their gambling attitudes and experiences. It also included the Canadian Problem Gambling Index (CPGI). The CPGI is a questionnaire that determines whether someone experiences negative consequences from gambling. It identifies people as non-gambling, non-problem gambling, low-risk gambling, moderate-risk gambling, or PG based on their responses. People with non-problem gambling (i.e., recreational gambling) gamble for fun but do not have gambling problems. People with low-risk gambling experience some problems and are at some risk of developing PG. People with moderate-risk gambling experience more problems and have a higher risk of progressing to PG. Finally, people with PG experience the most problems.

The researchers also collected information about the number of gambling venues in each province. Gambling venues included casinos, racetracks, and video lottery terminals (VLTs).

What the researchers found

There were 69,727 participants who did not gamble. Among those who gambled (65,768 participants), just over 92% gambled for fun and had no gambling problems. Participants who gambled for fun had lower stress levels and were more satisfied with their life than people who did not gamble.

Participants who gambled for fun were also more likely than people who did not gamble to have some other improvements in their health. For chronic health conditions, participants who gambled for fun were less likely to have a stroke or stomach ulcers than people who did not gamble. Participants who gambled for fun were no more likely to have other long-term health conditions like heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, or migraines than people who did not gamble. However, results suggested that they were more likely to report having poorer health.

These results suggest that recreational gambling may positively affect some people's health and well-being.

How you can use this research

Researchers can use this research to further investigate the benefits of recreational gambling on people's health and well-being. They could explore the reasons why people who gamble recreationally report better health than in the previous year, but tend to report poorer health than people who do not gamble. Prevention service providers can use this research to understand that recreational gambling is positively linked to wellbeing.

About the researchers

Brad R. Humphreys and **Jane E. Ruseski** are affiliated with the College of Business and Economics at West Virginia University in Morgantown, West Virginia, United States. **John A. Nyman** is affiliated with the School of Public Health at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis, Minnesota, United States. For more information about this study, please contact Brad R. Humphreys at brhumphreys@mail.wvu.edu.

Citation

Humphreys, B. R., Nyman, J. A., & Ruseski, J. E. (2021). The effect of recreational gambling on health and well-being. *Eastern Economic Journal, 47*, 29-75. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41302-020-00181-5

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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.

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Information item	Value
Title	The effect of recreational gambling on health and well-being
Article URL	https://link.springer.com/article/10.1057/s41302-020-00181-5
Authors	“Humphreys, Brad R.”, “Nyman, John A.”, “Ruseski, Jane E.”
Journal	Eastern Economic Journal
Year published	2021
Keywords	Gambling, health, well-being, recreational gambling, health impacts, satisfaction
Geographic coverage	Canada
Study population	Canadian adults who were 18 years of age and older (N=135,495).
DOI	https://doi.org/10.1057/s41302-020-00181-5
Citation	Humphreys, B. R., Nyman, J. A., & Ruseski, J. E. (2021). The effect of recreational gambling on health and well-being. *Eastern Economic Journal, 47*, 29-75. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41302-020-00181-5
Sampling procedure	The researchers used data from five cycles of the Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) in 2002, 2003, 2005, 2007, and 2009. The CCHS collects data through random digit dialling. The gambling module was administered to all provinces in 2002. It was administered by only some provinces in the other years.
Response rate	N/A
Study design	Observational (cross-sectional)
Snapshot written by	Natalie Ward