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Changes in offline gambling behaviour after the first COVID-19 lockdown in Germany

What this research is about

In Germany, the first national lockdown in response to the COVID-19 pandemic started in mid of March 2020. During lockdown, land-based gambling venues were closed. Lottery retail outlets were allowed to open if their main business was in selling products for essential daily needs. From May to June 2020, gambling venues were gradually able to re-open but must comply with hygiene requirements.

Internationally, a number of studies had investigated the effects of the closure of gambling venues. All studies reported a decline in gambling participation. There were some differences among subgroups of population. For example, some studies reported that people with gambling problems were more likely to switch to online gambling during lockdown. Only a few studies reported changes in gambling behaviour with regard to specific forms of gambling.

This study explored changes in gambling behaviour during and following the first lockdown in Germany. The study focused specifically on casino games, slot machines, and sports betting. These are higher-risk forms of gambling that are available offline and online in Germany. The researchers explored the characteristics of people who stopped gambling on these higher-risk forms of gambling or who switched to online gambling after the lockdown.

What the researchers did

The researchers recruited participants via an online access panel in Germany ("PAYBACK online panel"). This panel includes people who have signed up to participate in online surveys on a wide range of topics. The survey for this study occurred between December 2020 and January 2021. Participants were screened to

What you need to know

In Germany, the first national lockdown in response to the COVID-19 pandemic was from March to May 2020. This study explored changes in gambling behaviour after the lockdown among people who gambled offline on higher-risk forms of gambling. Survey participants were 612 adults who gambled offline on casino games, sports betting, and slot machines prior to the lockdown. Few people switched to online gambling after the lockdown. Most participants either continued to gamble offline or stopped gambling. About 37.1% of participants who bet on sports and 64.1% of participants who gambled on casino games stopped offline gambling. Female gender, younger age, and less frequent gambling were predictors of stopping offline gambling instead of continuing gambling after the lockdown. However, younger age and having more erroneous gambling beliefs were predictors of switching to online gambling.

ensure that they had gambled immediately before or during the phases of the pandemic in 2020. A total of 4,672 people completed the survey. The researchers analysed data from 612 participants who only gambled offline on casino games, slot machines, and sports betting prior to the lockdown.

The survey included the following measures:

- The Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI) to assess gambling problems.
- The Gamblers Beliefs Questionnaire (GBQ) to assess erroneous beliefs related to gambling.
- The Alcohol Use Disorder Identification Test-Consumption (AUDIT-C) to assess risky drinking.

- The Mental Health Inventory-5 (MHI-5) to screen for mental health (e.g., nervousness, feeling down, discouragement and sadness, happiness).

The survey also included sociodemographic questions, and questions about type and frequency of gambling.

What the researchers found

Of the 612 participants, slightly more than one quarter were women. The average age was 44.6 years old. Almost one-fifth had either migrated to Germany themselves or were born in Germany as children of migrants. Based on the period before the lockdown (January and February 2020), the average mental health score was 71.0 (out of 100) and the percentage of participants with risky drinking was 30.3%. These results were similar to the findings of a previous study with the German general population (average mental health score of 75.0 and 26% with risky drinking).

After the lockdown, almost half of the participants stopped gambling on the higher-risk forms of gambling (49.3%). About 43.0% continued to gamble offline. There were some differences when comparing between the different forms of gambling. Among participants who bet on sports, 37.1% stopped gambling offline after the lockdown. The percentage was 64.1% for participants who gambled on casino games. About 52.0% of participants who bet on sports and 26.7% of participants who gambled on casino games continued to gamble offline. Few people switched to online gambling (7.7% for slot machines, 9.2% for casino games, and 10.9% for sports betting).

Compared to men, women were more likely to stop offline gambling instead of continuing with offline gambling after the lockdown. Younger age and less frequent gambling were also predictors of quitting offline gambling. Additionally, people with a migration background were more likely to stop offline gambling after the lockdown.

Younger age, however, was a predictor of switching to online gambling. People with more erroneous gambling beliefs were also more likely to switch to online gambling. It should be noted that people with more erroneous gambling beliefs tended to gamble more frequently and have more gambling problems.

How you can use this research

These results show that temporary closure of gambling venues do not lead to a significant shift towards online gambling. Rather, it may give some people the opportunity to reduce or stop gambling. The researchers suggested that temporary closure could be considered as a measure to prevent excessive gambling and reduce harm.

About the researchers

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Citation

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