

research snapshot

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Gambling trends in Sweden during the first phase of the COVID-19 outbreak

What this research is about

Many countries introduced social distancing and other safety measures to curb the COVID-19 outbreak. While there is support that such safety measures can help combat the outbreak, they are also likely to have a mental health impact. In Sweden, concerns have been raised that social distancing can lead to an increase in gambling and problem gambling. The effect of social distancing may depend on the type of gambling. The cancelling of sports events and closing of casinos, bingo halls, and restaurants and clubs with slot machines reduce these types of gambling. But, online gambling for certain types of gambling may increase.

In response to these concerns, the Swedish government had introduced a temporary legislation that limits the amount of deposit to 5,000 SEK per week. Online gambling providers are also required to place a limit on how long people can gamble in one session. This study examined if there was an increase in gambling during the first phase of the COVID-19 outbreak in Sweden and whether people who gambled intensely were particularly affected. The researchers also examined if there was a move from online sports betting to online casino gambling.

What the researchers did

The researchers examined data from two sources. The first dataset came from the Swedish Gambling Authority's Gambling Pause registry. This registry is available for anyone who wishes to exclude themselves from gambling. As a license requirement, gambling providers must have their customers identify themselves before they can start gambling, both in venue and online. A lookup query is sent to

What you need to know

This study modelled trends in gambling before and during the first phase of the COVID-19 outbreak in Sweden. Specifically, the researchers examined if there was an increase in gambling and whether people who gambled intensely were particularly affected. They also examined if people moved to gamble online on casino games due to the cancelling of sports events. The researchers found that total gambling activity decreased by 13.29% during the first phase of the outbreak (from early March to early April 2020). There was an increase in online casino gambling, but a decrease in online sports betting. There was a decrease in high-intensity gambling, defined as making a deposit over 5,000 SEK in a week. These results suggest no increase in gambling or high-intensity, likely problematic gambling during the first phase of the COVID-19 outbreak in Sweden.

the registry to check whether a customer is currently in the registry. A positive lookup will exclude the person from gambling. The researchers examined the number of lookup queries per day from January 1, 2019 (the start of the registry) to April 8, 2020 (well into the first phase of the outbreak).

The second dataset covered the same period and came from a large online gambling provider in Sweden. The gambling provider offers both online sports betting and casino gambling. The data included daily total wagers and deposits. The researchers looked at the amount of wagers in sports betting and casino gambling, and deposits made by people who gambled with high intensity compared to those who

gambled with low intensity. The researchers considered making a deposit over the amount of 5,000 SEK in a week as high-intensity gambling.

The researchers used the lookup query data to model trends in gambling before and during the first phase of the COVID-19 outbreak. They used data up until March 11, 2020 (the day of the first death of a Swedish patient from the outbreak) to determine trends in gambling before the outbreak and to forecast the remaining 28 days. Any differences in the forecast and the observed data for those 28 days would signal changes in gambling activity as a consequence of the outbreak.

The researchers used data from the gambling provider to examine if people with high-intensity gambling were particularly affected. They also examined if there was a move from sports betting to online casino gambling during the first phase of the outbreak.

What the researchers found

Using the lookup query data, the researchers found an overall decrease of 13.29% in total gambling activity compared to the forecast. Thus, total gambling activity was lower during the first phase of the outbreak. There was no increase in total online gambling activity. However, a breakdown of the data revealed an increase of 8.63% in online casino gambling and a decrease of 74.8% in sports betting.

People with high-intensity gambling appeared to gamble less during the first phase of the outbreak. On average, high-intensity gambling decreased by 8.3%. No changes in gambling were observed for people with low-intensity gambling. Thus, there was no evidence of an increase in high-intensity, likely problematic gambling.

How you can use this research

The researchers made several suggestions for future research. These suggestions include examining the long-term effects of the COVID-19 outbreak on gambling, on different types of gambling, and on different subgroups of people who gamble. It is also unknown to what extent people who never gambled online have begun doing so during the outbreak.

About the researchers

Philip Lindner and **David Forsström** are affiliated with the Department of Clinical Neuroscience in the Centre for Psychiatry Research at Karolinska Institutet & Stockholm Health Care, and the Department of Psychology at Stockholm University in Sweden. **Jakob Jonsson** and **Per Carlbring** are affiliated with the Department of Psychology at Stockholm University in Sweden. **Anne H. Berman** is affiliated with the Department of Clinical Neuroscience in the Centre for Psychiatry Research at Karolinska Institutet & Stockholm Health Care, and the Department of Psychology at Uppsala University in Sweden. For more information about this study, please contact Philip Lindner at philip.lindner@ki.se.

Citation

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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.

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