

research snapshot

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Gambling behavior of online and non-online student gamblers

What this research is about

Gambling online is popular among college students. A research study has estimated that approximately 1 in 4 college students have gambled online. Previous studies have shown that differences exist between online and non-online student gamblers. However, no studies have explored the differences in gambling behaviour between online and non-online gamblers in a laboratory setting. Most studies have relied on gamblers' self-reported gambling behavior. However, self-report studies have some disadvantages, as certain behaviors may be under-reported (undesirable behaviors) and the participant's memory of actual gambling behavior may be faulty. The laboratory setting was used to eliminate the reliance on self-reported gambling behavior.

The current study examined if online student gamblers would play more hands in a video poker game, commit more errors, and wager more credits than non-online student gamblers in a laboratory setting.

What the researcher did

Participants were recruited from a university in the Midwest of U.S.A. Participants were first screened through an online survey. Those who indicated they had gambled online or offline at least once in their lifetime were invited to come to the laboratory for the second part of the study. Participants were excluded from the study if they potentially were problem gamblers. The final sample included 45 undergraduate college students.

Participants were also asked in the online survey how many hours they spent gambling online and offline in the past year to determine their gambling experience. Demographic information (e.g., gender, marital status) was collected and behavioral impulsivity was measured.

What you need to know

The researchers compared online American college student gamblers to non-online student gamblers in a laboratory setting. Participants played a video poker game with credits that had no monetary value. This study found that online college student gamblers played more hands and committed more errors than non-online student gamblers. The two groups did not differ in the amount of credits that they wagered. Results suggest that online gamblers engage in potentially more harmful gambling behavior (e.g., playing more hands and committing more errors) than non-online gamblers.

Impulsivity is the tendency to act with little forethought or consideration of the consequences.

In the laboratory setting, online and non-online student gamblers played video poker in three separate sessions of 10 minute each. The number of hands played, errors committed (i.e., accuracy), and credits wagered were recorded and totaled. The credits had no monetary value.

Data were analyzed to determine if online and non-online gamblers differed in their video-poker gambling behavior. The researchers controlled for the effects of gambling experience, problem gambling, and impulsivity.

What the researcher found

The researchers found that online student gamblers committed more errors and played more hands in the video poker game than non-online student gamblers. Online and non-online gamblers did not differ in regards

to the number of credits they wagered across the three gambling sessions.

The number of errors committed was related to problem gambling. That is, as the number of errors increased, problem gambling increased. However, this was only seen in non-online student gamblers. The researchers suggested this may have been because problem gamblers were excluded from the study.

The results suggest that online gamblers engage in potentially more harmful gambling behavior (e.g., playing more hands and committing more errors) than non-online gamblers.

How you can use this research

Government regulators can use this research to explore the differences between online and non-online gamblers in the debate about legalizing online gambling in the US and around the world.

Future research should examine differences in the gambling behavior of online and non-online gamblers in both laboratory settings and more natural settings to better understand how the gambling environment may influence gambling behavior. Additionally, further research is needed to determine if these results from a study with non-problem student gamblers pertain to online and non-online *problem* gamblers. Understanding the differences between online and non-online problem gamblers can lead to more effective treatment plans and better treatment outcomes for these two groups.

About the Researcher

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Keywords

Online gamblers, non-online gamblers, video poker, problem gambling

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