

# research snapshot

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## Gambling as a leisure activity and its relation to satisfaction of psychological needs

### What this research is about

For some people, gambling may be a problematic activity that leads to many negative outcomes. However, for the majority of people, it is not at all problematic. In many cases, gambling is simply a chosen leisure activity. Yet, not too many studies have explored the leisure side of this activity.

Gambling could positively impact one's health and well-being. It could satisfy some major psychological needs. First, gambling could act as a detachment to promote rest and recovery. Second, it could produce excitement and a feeling of being alive. Third, it could enhance mastery or the feeling of competence. Fourth, it could lead to a sense of autonomy when people feel they can direct and regulate their own behaviour. Fifth, it could promote affiliation or the feeling of being connected. Sixth, it could provide reassurance or self-affirmation of who one is.

It is important to understand the leisure side of gambling to see how it could meet some psychological needs. This study aimed to explore which psychological needs that gambling meets. Specifically, it aimed to examine whether certain gambling forms satisfy particular needs.

### What the researchers did

The researchers recruited customers of Kindred Group Plc, an Internet gambling provider. Email invitations were sent to customers living in the UK, Sweden, and the Netherlands to complete an online survey. The survey included demographic information such as age, gender, education, marital status, employment status and household income. It asked participants about their gambling involvement. Participants first answered which form of gambling they spent the

### What you need to know

This research examined whether gambling as a leisure activity meets certain psychological needs. The researchers recruited 1416 people who gamble online. The findings revealed five major areas of psychological need satisfaction. These included challenge and mastery, self-affirmation, risk and excitement, detachment, and affiliation. Moreover, poker players had higher ratings of meeting challenge and mastery, self-affirmation, and affiliation needs than players of other forms of gambling. Slot machine players had higher detachment needs than sport bettors. While stress did not vary by gambling type, happiness did. Sport betting and poker players showed higher levels of happiness than slots machine players.

most time on, their frequency of gambling, how much money they spent on gambling, and the length of time gambling. The researchers also asked how many online sites they used.

Based on their most used form of gambling, participants rated the extent to which it satisfied 27 psychological needs. The list included all the psychological needs the researchers had identified in past literature. This included the Recreation Experience Preference Scale to measure how much participants desired the experiences and expected gambling to meet their needs. Finally, participants also rated their levels of stress and happiness.

The researchers analyzed the survey responses from 1416 participants. These participants had a preference for one of five forms of gambling: sports betting, horse race betting, slots, poker, and casino

table games. The majority of participants (90.6%) were male.

### What the researchers found

The results revealed that over half of participants reported that gambling satisfied some psychological needs. For most psychological needs, participants tended to agree that gambling satisfied those needs. The most notable was 'excitement', with many participants either agreeing or disagreeing about it.

Overall, the 27-item list of psychological needs collapsed into five main areas. The first area, 'challenge and mastery', was related to personal development, competitiveness, and learning. The second area, 'self-affirmation', had to do with improvements to the self, control, and accomplishment. The third area, 'risk and excitement', was related to risk, excitement, and relief from boredom. The fourth area, 'detachment', was related to stress release, relaxation, and escape from problems. Finally, the fifth area, 'affiliation', had to do with meeting new people, socializing with friends, and competing with others.

Psychological needs were associated with different forms of gambling. Poker players had higher ratings of satisfaction of challenge and mastery needs than players of other forms of gambling. Self-affirmation and affiliation needs were also higher for poker players than sports bettors and slot machine players. The need of detachment was higher for slot machine players than for sport bettors. Interestingly, happiness levels differed by gambling form. Sport bettors and poker players showed higher levels of happiness than slot machine players. Stress did not differ by gambling form.

### How you can use this research

This research could be used by service providers and gambling researchers. Clinicians could assess how psychological needs are being satisfied by gambling and how they relate to well-being. Future studies could examine how psychological needs relate to disordered gambling behaviours. Researchers could also extend this research to a wider range of settings,

including non-internet gambling, and include more female gamblers.

### 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).

