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Characteristics of people who cash out during in-play sports betting

What this research is about

In Canada, sports betting has increased in popularity. Since 2018, regulatory changes have allowed for in-play sports betting. With in-play sports betting, people can place bets on several different outcomes while a game is ongoing. These outcomes can be at the micro level (e.g., who will score next) and the macro level (e.g., which team will win the game).

A feature of in-play betting is the ability to cash out. Cashing out lets people withdraw a bet before they know the outcome. This allows them to secure a portion of their potential win or minimize their potential loss. But the ability to cash out may put people at risk of harm because it frees up funds to place more bets. This may fuel chasing behavior as people may bet in the hope of winning more money.

There is not much research on the use of cashing out among people who bet on sports. The purpose of this study was to examine the demographic, gambling-related, and psychological characteristics of people who cash out during in-play sports betting.

What the researchers did

The researchers recruited participants through an online panel for a larger study on sports betting. For the current study, they analyzed data from 224 participants from Ontario, Canada, who were at least 18 years old and had engaged in in-play sports betting in the last three months.

The online questionnaire asked participants about:

- Demographics (e.g., age, gender, and ethnicity).
- Mental health using the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS-21).
- Substance uses using the Screener for Substance and Behavioral Addictions (SSBA).
- Emotion regulation using the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DESR-18).
- Impulsivity using the Short Impulsive Behaviour Scale (SUPPS-P– Short Form).
- Childhood trauma using the Adverse Childhood Experiences Questionnaire.
- Gambling behaviour over the past three months using the Gambling Timeline Followback.
- Severity of gambling problems using the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI). A score of 0

What you need to know

The purpose of this study was to examine the demographic, gambling-related, and psychological characteristics of people who cash out during in-play sports betting. A total of 224 adults living in Ontario, Canada, completed an online survey. All participants had engaged in in-play sports betting in the last three months. Just over half (52%) of the participants used the cash-out feature while engaging in in-play sports betting. Compared to participants who did not use the cash-out feature, those who did were typically younger, had heavier use of alcohol and cannabis, and reported increased levels of stress, anxiety, and depression. They were also more likely to bet on sports to make money than those who did not cash out. The main reasons that participants cashed out were because (1) they wanted their money right away; (2) they wanted to limit their losses; and (3) they believed that it was less risky to cash out. These findings can inform initiatives to reduce harms associated with in-play sports betting.

indicates non-problem gambling, 1–2 indicates low risk, 3–7 indicates moderate risk, and 8–27 indicates problem gambling.
- Gambling-related harm using the Short Gambling Harm Screen (SGHS).
- Gambling motives using the Gambling Motives Questionnaire-Financial (GMQ-F).
- Sports betting motives using the Sports Betting Motivation Scale (SBMS).
- An open-ended question asking whether participants used the cash-out feature. If they did, participants were asked for their top three reasons for using the feature.

What the researchers found

Just over half (52%) of the participants used the cash-out feature while engaging in in-play sports betting. On average, those who used the cash-out feature were younger (39 years old) than those who did not (44 years old). There were no other sociodemographic differences between the two groups.

Participants who used the cash-out feature reported heavier alcohol and cannabis uses than those who did not. They also reported increased levels of stress, anxiety, and depression.

On average, participants who used the cash-out feature had more severe problem gambling and experienced more gambling-related harms. Differences between the two groups, however, were not significant after correcting for false positive results. On the SBMS, participants who used the cash-out feature were more likely to endorse betting on sports to make money than those who did not.

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How you can use this research

This study can inform initiatives to reduce harms associated with in-play sports betting. Policy makers and gambling operators can also develop policies and procedures to control the mechanisms associated with cashing out that contribute to harms.

About the researchers

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