What this article is about
Gambling is a popular activity in many countries. It is widely available in the United Kingdom. However, some people experience harms from their gambling. Certain groups are at greater risk of harms from gambling than others, reflecting health inequalities.

Migrants may be at greater risk for experiencing harms from gambling. Migrants are people who move to a new country from where they were born. They may be at greater risk due to social and cultural factors. Migrants tend to live in poorer neighbourhoods where certain forms of gambling, such as slot machines, are usually located.

There is little information about gambling-related harms affecting migrants. The current review aimed to improve understanding of gambling behaviour and gambling-related harms among migrants, their reasons for gambling participation, and their experience of support for gambling problems.

What was done?
The authors carried out a rapid review using the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines. They searched several databases, including Scopus, PubMed, Web of Science, PsycINFO, and Embase, for peer-reviewed studies. They also searched grey literature for evidence related to migrants and gambling.

The authors searched for studies published between January 2007 and July 2018. They included studies written in English and focusing on migrants aged 18 and over. The authors excluded studies about children, adolescents, refugees or asylum seekers.

Why is this article important?
There is little information about gambling-related harms affecting migrants. This review aimed to fill this gap. The review found evidence of a “harm paradox” for gambling among migrants. While fewer migrants gamble compared to non-migrants, those who do are more likely to experience harms. More research is needed to better understand the culturally-specific harms migrants experience from their gambling. There are specific barriers which may prevent migrants from seeking help for their gambling problems. More work is needed to ensure that gambling support services are equipped to meet migrants’ unique needs.

The authors identified 38 studies that met their criteria. They assessed the studies’ quality using the Critical Appraisal of a Survey checklist, or the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme Qualitative Research Checklist. The authors identified key themes and concepts related to these four aims:

1) What is the extent of gambling among migrants?
2) What are the reasons for migrants’ gambling?
3) What is the impact of gambling for migrants?
4) What information exists about the support available to migrants experiencing harms from gambling?

What you need to know
There were 38 studies included in the review. Most of the studies were from either Australia or New Zealand. A key theme identified from the studies is that migrants are less likely to gamble than non-migrants. Although they gamble less, those who
gamble are more likely to experience harms or be at risk of developing gambling problems. This suggests the presence of a “harm paradox”.

Fifteen studies explored migrants’ reasons for gambling. There are three patterns. First, migrants gamble to relieve the stress from moving to a new country. Stress may be caused by language difficulties, isolation, pressures of fitting in, lack of appropriate leisure activities, under- or unemployment, etc. Second, migrants may be exposed to more gambling advertising and have easier access to gambling compared to when they were in their home country. Two studies in Australia and one study in New Zealand found that migrants were targeted by gambling marketing. Third, some protective factors may prevent gambling participation among migrants. These factors include religious and moral beliefs.

The review suggests that migrants experience similar harms from gambling as non-migrants. These harms may include: financial problems, relationship problems, suicide, mental health problems, etc.

There are two themes about the support available to migrants experiencing harms from gambling. The first is that there are specific barriers that may prevent migrant gamblers from seeking help. In some cultural contexts, migrants may prefer to seek help from their family rather than from an outside group. However, cultural contexts and fear of shame may also prevent migrants from seeking help. In addition, culturally-appropriate services may not be available.

The second theme highlights ways to improve gambling support services for migrants. These include being available in migrants’ first language, being sensitive to their needs, and showing an understanding of their specific cultural beliefs, rituals, customs and/or traditions.

Who is it intended for?

This review is intended for gambling service providers and researchers. It also suggests areas for future studies. For instance, future research could compare patterns between recent and non-recent migrants. Future research could also explore how the host country’s culture and gambling regulations impact migrants’ gambling and potential harms. Finally, future research could study best practices for how to support migrants with gambling problems.

About the researchers

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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 responsible 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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