

How Have the Dimensions of Online/Problem Gambling Changed due to Covid-19?

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Project Background

15.6% of adults across Great Britain participated in gambling within the last 12 months. Of this cohort, in an average week 74% of users gambled online. This is important due to online gambling being more likely to cause problem gambling. The dimensions of online and problem gambling have the potential to be impacted by Covid-19, due to the shutting of gambling establishments, cessation of major sports and the furloughing/redundancy of many workers across Great Britain. This could cause an influx of individuals into online gambling and drastically affect the gambling behaviour of individuals during this time. The aim of this study therefore, is to evaluate if these measures have caused a change in the dimensions of online and problem gambling.

Data and Methods

Gambling behaviour, Geodemographic and Harm data for 2,002,885 active players, was assessed from September 2019 to July 2020. The gambling behaviour was assessed through the average number of active days, bets, turnover and gross-gaming revenue from both pre and post Covid-19 using time-series graphs. This method was also used to assess the geodemographics of registering individuals in terms of age. The other geodemographic variables of average gender and Acorn category were studied through the modal value for each month of the study. Problem gambling was assessed through the number of markers of harm an individual experienced. The number of each harm experienced per month was then presented in a time-series object. In addition to this, a multivariate regression model was used to assess which variables influence the prevalence of harm. The spatial distribution of all of the variables discussed was also assessed using a local indicator of spatial association statistic.

Key Findings

The results of the analysis displayed that Covid-19 had an impact on the dimensions of online

and problem gambling. Some of the results were hypothesised, such as an increase in the number of individuals following the onset of the 'lockdown' measures and an increase in gaming activity during Covid-19. However, this was not caused by a movement of individuals from sportsbook to gaming products which was expected due to the cessation of sports. This was caused by an increase in the gaming activity of individuals already gambling on gaming products. This was hypothesised to increase the number of harms due to gaming products being considered as more harmful than sportsbook products. This however, was not witnessed and upon studying the spatial distribution of the markers of harm, this was closely associated with an increase in sportsbook activity, high age, low socio-economic Acorn category, high Index of Multiple Deprivation score and high access to gambling establishments, which were all witnessed in the Northern cities of England. Thus, suggesting that those areas that experienced an increase in problem gambling were not associated with increasing gaming activity but rather it was associated with areas that had high registrations of older aged players and low socio-economic areas, likely caused by the closing of betting shops, suggesting geodemographics may be more important than gambling preference. This was supported by the multivariate regression model which displayed that the most at-risk group was older men from lower socio-economic groups, suggesting Covid-19 may have changed the dimensions of the group most at risk of problem gambling.

Value of the Research

There is currently a gap in the literature in terms of understanding the influences on problem gambling and which groups are most at risk of harming themselves due to gambling. This report aims to assess this within the context of Covid-19, understanding the impact this may have had on the online gambling sphere and if this has produced a new group that is most at risk of problem gambling.