

Gambling in Australia during COVID-19: improving understanding of online gambling 'sessions'.

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Introduction and Aims: Few studies have examined the behaviours and experiences of people who gamble during discrete occasions or 'sessions' of gambling. During the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions in Australia land-based gambling venues were temporarily closed and major national and international sporting codes were suspended.

Design and Methods: During June-July 2020 we surveyed 1,534 people about their gambling behaviour, alcohol consumption, and experience of negative consequences during their most recent ('last') session of online gambling (in the previous 30 days).

Results: The main products that participants spent money on were horse racing and sports. Median session duration was 65 minutes (IQR 20-180 minutes) and median spend AUD\$50 (IQR \$23-180). Males and younger participants (aged 18-34) reported gambling for longer and spending more money than their counterparts. Participants who gambled for longer were more likely to gamble on a wider range of products and be classified as being at higher risk of experiencing gambling problems (according to the Problem Gambling Severity Index). Alcohol consumption before or during the session and gambling on impulse were both associated with higher gambling expenditure. Around 60% reported that their most recent online gambling session was enjoyable for them, but two in five (40%) reported making decisions while gambling that day that they later regretted (most commonly spending more money or time than intended and gambling on impulse) and 24% reported experiencing negative impacts in the days following the session, including felt guilty or depressed, experienced financial problems, or lacked motivation.

Discussions and Conclusions: Findings point to a range of priorities for future research and public health interventions, including initiatives aimed at reducing and limiting session duration, spend, and co-consumption of alcohol. This analysis greatly enhances understanding of the behaviours of people who gambled in Australia during the COVID-19 restrictions.

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