

Problem Gambling and Mental Health Disorders among Undergraduate Students during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Background

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on gamblers is still unclear, though several studies reported a decrease or maintenance of gambling behaviors (Brodeur et al., 2021).

Undergraduate students are at high risk of problem gambling; the estimated rate of problem gambling among this group is 10.23% (Nowak, 2018).

Mental health factors play a crucial role in the development and maintenance of problem gambling (Loo et al., 2019).

Little is known about the relationship between problem gambling and mental health disorders amid the COVID-19 pandemic, though researchers have raised concerns (Håkansson et al., 2020).

References

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Research Questions

RQ1. What is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on problem gambling and mental health among undergraduate students?

RQ2. To what extent do mental health disorders co-occur with problem gambling among undergraduate students during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Methods

Online survey data collected by the UNLV Behavioral Addictions Lab (March 2020-April 2021)

Samples: UNLV undergraduate students (N=1,757)

Data Analysis: A chi-square test was used to compare PG rates; A multiple linear regression was employed to predict PGSI scores.

Key Findings

Overall, 7.44% and 3.26% of undergraduate gamblers are at moderate and problem gambling levels, respectively.

COVID-19 pandemic remained unrelated to the prevalence of problem gambling.

Phase	Moderate Risk Gambling Rate	Problem Gambling Rate
Early Stage of Outbreak (March 2020–June 2020)	6.38%	2.13%
Later Stage of Outbreak (July 2020–April 2021)	7.74%	3.57%

Depression and marijuana use are significant predictors of problem gambling.

Implications

Present findings contradict concerns that COVID-19 was a major driver of gambling problems, suggesting a more nuanced look at the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on overall gambling and problem gambling prevalence.

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