

GAMBLING-RELATED RISKS AND THE ROLE OF RESPONSIBLE GAMBLING

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ABSTRACT. This article examines the problems related to gambling, particularly in the context of Georgia, while exploring global approaches that promote responsible decision-making. It discusses various forms of gambling, including lotteries, sports betting, electronic gambling machines (EGMs), and casino games, and their associations with problem gambling. The article highlights the link between high gambling involvement and problem gambling, emphasizing that the level of engagement in gambling activities has a greater impact on behavior than the specific type of game played. The role of advertising in promoting gambling is discussed, with a focus on the marketing strategies employed by the industry. Additionally, it provides an overview of the Georgian gambling market and the legislative provisions implemented to mitigate the adverse effects of gambling on society. Moreover, the article emphasizes the importance of broadcast media monitoring in academic research, particularly in assessing the effects of gambling advertisements on individuals' behaviors and attitudes. The article concludes by highlighting the importance of comprehensive analysis combining statistical indicators with social studies to assess the effectiveness of gambling regulations and reforms. It emphasizes the need for ongoing research to understand the complexities of gambling behavior and develop strategies to promote responsible gambling practices.

KEYWORDS: PROBLEM GAMBLING, GAMBLING-RELATED RISKS, RESPONSIBLE GAMBLING, LEGISLATIVE PROVISION.

INTRODUCTION

Gambling has long been a contentious topic, with attitudes towards it varying across societies. While it contributes significantly to state economies under free market and liberal policies, many traditional communities consider it unethical. As the gambling industry continues to grow and attract more players, it raises important questions about why people become addicted to gambling and the associated risks. This article aims to examine the problems related to gambling, particularly in the context of Georgia, while exploring global approaches that promote responsible decision-making.

FORMS OF GAMBLING

The realm of commercial gambling encompasses various activities rather than just one. It comprises

lotteries, horse and sports betting, EGMs, bingo, card games, and casino table games that rely on chance, such as craps and roulette. These forms of gambling are accessible online and have different variations and combinations available (Binde, 2017).

The reasons for engaging in different forms of gambling vary depending on individual perspectives, and as a result, it is reasonable to assume that different forms of gambling are linked to problem gambling to varying degrees (Balodis, 2014; Holtgraves, 2009). According to behavioral and addiction theories, games with a higher frequency of returns, such as Electronic Gambling Machines, have a stronger association with problem gambling than slower and less frequent activities like lotteries (Haw, 2008; Linnet, 2010). Cognitive theories suggest that multiple cognitive fallacies are more strongly linked to problem gambling than other forms of gambling (Goodie, 2013). Sociological theory suggests that excessive gambling is closely associated with gambling types that in-

volve subcultures in which participants adopt significant social identities. Neuroscientific research indicates that certain types of gambling have a greater impact on the neural substrates involved in decision-making, potentially increasing the risk of gambling addiction due to a complex interaction between the characteristics of gambling products and individual risk factors (Murch, 2016).

GAMBLING INVOLVEMENT (VERSATILITY)

The link between certain types of gambling and problem gambling (PG) is well established, leading to a recent focus on examining participation in various gaming activities. Statistical analysis of demographic surveys and large datasets has revealed a positive relationship between heavy gaming engagement and PG (Holtgraves, 2009; Phillips, 2013). "Involvement" refers to participation in multiple gambling activities, with low involvement indicating limited participation and high involvement indicating participation in a wide range of activities. This engagement has been referred to as "versatility" in the literature (Welte, 2004).

Many studies have shown that the association between problem gambling and various types of gambling reduces or disappears when statistically controlled. However, it does not mean that all forms of gambling are equally harmful. Instead, problem gamblers tend to have a higher level of gambling engagement, which has a greater impact on their gambling behavior than the specific type of game being played. This suggests that it is not necessarily the type of game that is the problem but rather the level of involvement in gambling activities (LaPlante, 2013).

The connection between excessive gambling involvement and PG is not inherently causal. For instance, a recreational gambler may infrequently participate in various types of gambling for small amounts, while someone may have problematic gambling behavior with only one type of gambling. The link between PG and increased gambling involvement could explain why high gambling engagement is associated with PG. Intensity refers to the amount of time or money spent on gambling, with low intensity indicating relatively small amounts and high intensity indicating relatively large amounts. In some studies, "depth participation" has been used instead of "breadth involvement" to describe the frequency (i.e., intensity) of gambling. Gambling intensity is directly related to PG (LaPlante, 2013).

PROBLEM GAMBLING

All types of gambling involve the possibility of winning more than the amount bet, but they vary in their structural characteristics and the experiences they provide to the gambler. Lotteries are attractive because they allow people to bet a small amount and potentially win a large sum of money. Bingo is often seen as a social activity. Sports betting has an element of skill involved, and electronic gambling machines enable players to engage in extended playing sessions where they can place small bets repeatedly in quick succession, potentially leading to a dissociative state of mind (Parke, 2017; Binde, 2013).

Demographic surveys have shown that problem gambling is common among individuals who participate in different forms of gambling (Binde, 2011). Binde's research found that problem gambling was frequently associated with interactive online gambling, casino gambling, and electronic gaming machines (EGMs), while sports pools, bingo, horse betting, and sports betting were only moderately associated with problem gambling.

A meta-analysis of Canada's legal gambling sector revealed that video lottery terminals (also known as EGMs in bars) were the gambling format most strongly linked to problem and compulsive gambling, according to researchers (Mazar, 2020).

The data from Sweden revealed a strong association between problem gambling and several types of gambling, including EGMs, casino gaming, bingo, and poker (Binde, 2017).

Various studies conducted on clinical populations and samples of people with gambling problems have investigated the relationship between different types of gambling and problem gambling. Grant and Kim's study of 78 patients diagnosed with compulsive gambling in the United States found that slot machines, cards, and blackjack were the most played types of gambling. Another study conducted in the United States on individuals seeking treatment for compulsive gambling found that video lottery terminals, slot machines, casino games, and lotteries were the most problematic forms of gambling. These findings may be related to neuro-marketing, as gambling games and casino venues are more complex than simple Pavlovian tasks performed by animals. They involve various stimuli, such as colors, lighting, reward-related visuals, music, and social cues. Some studies have attempted to demonstrate that psy-

chological interventions can alter gambling behavior by changing activity within the brain reward system. Therefore, an evolutionary neuromarketing approach involves investigating the ultimate causes of diverse brain activity patterns rather than just recording them. Establishing central neuroimaging data repositories can help in identifying universal marketing-related fMRI patterns.

The detection and screening of problem gambling is crucial for its treatment and prevention. Numerous studies have established cross-sectional or longitudinal correlates of problem gambling, including traits and behaviors associated with problem gambling. Research has shown that being male and young is strongly associated with online gambling. Men take more risks and have lower levels of impulsive coping compared to women, and those who take more risks but have lower levels of impulsive coping are more likely to gamble. Gender and gambling engagement, as well as problem gambling, have been studied through experiments, revealing that men gamble twice as much as women in terms of participation or frequency. Gender differences in problem gambling are also significant, with a higher percentage of male gamblers having gambling disorders compared to female gamblers. Researchers have used regressions to examine gender differences in gambling engagement and issues (Griffiths et al., 2009b; Ladd & Petry, 2002; Petry, 2006; Petry & Weinstock, 2007; Wong, 2010, 2013).

Engaging in risky activities is not only prevalent among adults but also among adolescents. According to global research, gambling is 2-4 times more common among teenagers than adults. Adolescent gamblers, like adult gamblers, are more likely to be male, and men are more likely than women to develop gambling problems (Derevensky, 2004). Peer group gambling is an important component, much like other elements of adolescent peer activities. Peers may introduce gambling as a shared social activity. However, when teenagers develop gambling issues, previous companions are replaced with gambling acquaintances, which can perpetuate or intensify the problematic behavior (Gupta, 2000).

Teenagers are at higher risk of developing gambling problems if they have parents with gambling issues, start gambling at a younger age, and exhibit more impulsive behavior. Furthermore, adolescents from families with gambling issues are more likely to gamble than those without such issues (Derevensky, 2004).

Research has suggested that risky behavior may be

related to the brain formation process, which can result in heightened sensitivity to rewards in certain regions of the brain. The amygdala, ventromedial prefrontal cortex, and other brain systems that are responsible for regulating harm avoidance may not be fully developed, which can contribute to the tendency towards risky behavior (Chambers, 2003).

ROLE OF ADVERTISING

It is widely acknowledged that the media wields significant influence over people's actions and perspectives. In the realm of commercial advertising, the conventional approach aims to capture customer attention, foster positive sentiments towards the product, and promote the adoption of the advocated messaging. In modern marketing, an emotional component is added to create additional value for customers. The gaming sector, being highly attractive to marketers, applies various marketing techniques within one of the fastest-growing industries driven by new technologies. Gambling advertisements directly impact interest and accessibility by informing individuals about gambling opportunities through communicative strategies.

Analyzing the content of several gambling platforms in Georgia reveals that the advertising messages/slogans encourage individuals to believe they have favorable chances of winning or recouping their money. These advertisements emphasize luck rather than hard work or sensible investing, promoting the allure of luck, dreams, and free entertainment while exaggerating the probability of winning. Marketing campaigns that promote gambling as a means to secure an ideal, easy, and immediate future have proven highly appealing, albeit risky, for individuals who neglect other essential aspects of life, such as employment and education.

Different advertising and marketing strategies are employed to promote gambling products, including media advertisements that shape potential customers' perceptions through placements and direct promotion. Such strategies play on self-identity, social status, and sexuality, appealing to the cognitive aspects of advertising. Personal communication also triggers an emotional connection when individual gamblers are treated specially and made to feel valued within the company. Exceptional service, personalized communication, VIP benefits, participation in exclusive events, and other perks enhance gamblers' comfort and sense of unique-

ness, influencing their loyalty and behavior towards the company.

Digital advertising is widely utilized in Georgia, leveraging the rapidly growing direction of online marketing, which allows for data analysis and is both feasible and effective. Pop-up promotions for gambling sites are frequently encountered on various websites in the form of pre-rolls, static and animated banners, and even gambling-related emails. Internet advertising facilitates a swift online gambling experience as users can easily access demo versions and gain a better understanding of the nature of the site.

Prominent celebrities are increasingly employed by major operators to endorse and lend credibility to gaming brands. High-profile female celebrities, sports personalities, and influencers are used in promotions and advertisements targeting predominantly male audiences, enticing them to engage in gambling. Famous artists and sports figures endorse products by appearing in commercial media advertisements and wearing branded items available for purchase by consumers.

Sponsorship remains a prevalent form of indirect advertising that enhances the glamour associated with products and fosters public trust in the company. Sports sponsorship is emerging as a primary marketing platform for gambling firms, which is significant in Georgia, where sports development relies heavily on private-sector sponsorship.

OVERVIEW OF GEORGIAN MARKET AND LEGISLATIVE PROVISIONS

Over the past twenty years, the gambling industry in Georgia has experienced substantial growth. This development has had a positive impact on the country's micro and macroeconomic indicators. However, it has also had societal implications and has given rise to various social issues. Presently, the Revenue Service is responsible for issuing permits in the gaming sector, which include permits for establishing gaming machine cabins, organizing gambling salons, setting up gambling clubs, operating totalizers, arranging lotteries, organizing bingo, conducting incentive raffles, and providing gambling and/or games with prizes.

In response to the societal context, the government took certain measures concerning the expansion of the gaming industry. As of March 1, 2022, new regulations regarding the gaming business were implemented

based on the initiative of the Prime Minister of Georgia. These regulations include a prohibition on online gambling for individuals under the age of 25 and for individuals listed as dependent or prohibited persons, such as socially vulnerable individuals and civil servants. Additionally, gambling operators are now required to record information about individuals entering gambling premises, following the rules established by the Minister of Finance of Georgia. Companies have been instructed to prevent players from transferring or depositing money into another player's gaming accounts (Legislative Herald of Georgia, 2022).

The aim of implementing legal regulations was to mitigate the adverse impact of gambling on society. In pursuit of this objective, amendments were made to Article 8 of the Law of Georgia "On Advertising". Consequently, the distribution of advertisements related to gambling and games of chance in any form or through any means, including electronic communication networks, was prohibited. However, there were two exceptions to this rule. Firstly, advertisements could be placed in real and virtual spaces only in areas where the lawful operation of gambling and/or totalizer facilities is permitted. Secondly, advertising placement was allowed in exchange for sponsoring sports events, sports competitions, and activities of sports organizations, as well as in designated areas such as international airports and border-customs checkpoints (Legislative Herald of Georgia, 2022).

It should be highlighted that the most recent update of statistical data in the gaming industry occurred in the first quarter of 2023, specifically during the months of January and February. The statistics from this period hold considerable significance as they represent the initial indicators following the implementation of the new regulations introduced by the government.

During the period from March 1, 2022, to March 2023, a total of 1,457,526 individuals were recorded in the list of prohibited persons in the database of the Revenue Service under the Ministry of Finance. Among them, 4,901 individuals were registered as dependents, with 34 individuals included based on a court order and 4,867 applications submitted by individuals themselves. These data demonstrate the effectiveness of the non-enumeration system established by the legislation, as it provides the necessary data for analysis across various domains (Revenues Service, 2023).

It is worth noting that there has been a 12% reduction in gaming business fees based on the January-February 2023 budget. The data from the state treasury

reveals that a total of 1,874,465.50 GEL from gaming business fees was allocated to the consolidated budget during the first two months of the current year, compared to 2,124,796.21 GEL received during the same period in the previous year.

A substantial decline of 81% was observed in the funds generated from the incentive lottery. The State Treasury data indicates that during the first two months of 2023, a total of 335,137.50 GEL was allocated to the budget from the incentive lottery, in contrast to the amount of 1,779,946.11 GEL received during the corresponding period in 2022 (State Treasure, 2023).

Conversely, there has been a significant rise of 160% in the funds contributed to the budget from gaming machines. During the months of January and February 2023, a total of 808,734.00 GEL was allocated to the budget from gaming machines, in comparison to the amount of 310,800.10 GEL received during the same two-month period in 2022.

The examination of statistical data reveals contrasting trends in the areas of licenses and incentive draws, suggesting a potential decrease in the number of participants. Conversely, there has been a notable surge in the contributions to the budget originating from gaming machines, implying a contrasting observation. This discrepancy highlights the need for a comprehensive analysis that combines statistical indicators with social studies to assess the progress made towards the intended objectives of the implemented reforms.

BROADCAST MEDIA MONITORING

One of the essential aspects of academic research is the collection and analysis of quantitative data, which is also true for studying the field of gambling. However, in this area, there are several challenges that result in a lack of practical statistical data. These difficulties pose limitations to conducting empirical studies due to the unavailability of necessary data.

An important consideration for this paper is to define the extent of gambling in Georgia in order to address tangible and noticeable issues surrounding the topic. It is worth noting that the Statistics Office does not directly possess data on the number of players across the country. To determine the scope of the field based on official data, one can rely on the annual budget contributions from gambling companies. However, these statistics are not publicly accessible, and obtain-

ing them requires filing a public information request.

Given these circumstances and to understand the extent of the restrictive and obstructive factors, it was decided to analyze media data to gain insights into the scale of the gambling industry.

In collaboration with the media agency, data on the amount spent on gambling advertisements in the television space and the results obtained during 2020-2021 were made available for research. It is important to note that the agency utilizes the internationally recognized and licensed program "Kantar" for data collection. Kantar is a data and evidence-based organization that provides insights and practical recommendations to clients worldwide. They gather data digitally and disseminate real-time insights across more than 90 markets globally.

The summarized data for 2020 and 2021 reveals that the estimated total expenditure on gambling advertisements by television companies during this period amounted to GEL 371,457,788. It is important to acknowledge that the estimated value represents an initial figure reflecting the position of television companies in their pursuit of generating revenue from the gambling industry. This value is adjusted based on market conditions, pricing policies, and existing commercial contracts. According to the same data, in 2020, TV advertisements reached a total of 319,763 units targeted at the audience, while in 2021, the figure increased to 382,420 viewers. The statistics indicate that 99.6% of the target audience viewed the advertisements three or more times. The technical description encompasses the population of Georgia, with the target audience being individuals aged 18 years and above. The period of analysis spans two years, from January 1, 2020, to December 31, 2021. The status of the advertisements was live, and the viewing was on the same day as live (VOSDAL). The sample size for this analysis is 1,212,000 viewers (Havas Media Group, 2022).

Based on the information obtained through media monitoring, it can be inferred that most gambling companies in Georgia allocated marketing costs to advertise their products across multiple channels to reach a wider population.

A crucial subject of examination pertains to the monetary gains acquired by television stations during the timeframe spanning from 2020 to 2023. This particular period assumes significance as it signifies the influence of government regulations implemented in March 2022 upon the domain of television advertising enterprises.

As per the data provided by the National Communications Commission, the aggregate value of televisions, as reported by companies, amounted to 136.15 million GEL in 2020. In the subsequent year of 2021, this figure declined to 127.35 million GEL and further decreased to 119.68 million GEL in 2022. It is noteworthy that the market exhibited a general downward trajectory in revenues during the 2020-2022 period, potentially attributed to the repercussions of the pandemic. However, it is evident that the regulations imposed on the gaming industry played a significant role in the 6% reduction observed in the market in 2022 (Communications Commission, 2023).

To exemplify the aforementioned, a comparison can be made between the data from March 2021 and the corresponding indicators in 2022, which corresponds to the period when the prohibition on all forms of television advertising related to the gaming industry was implemented. In 2021, this metric stood at 6.59 million GEL, whereas in 2022, it decreased to 3.45 million GEL. The substantial decline of 48% serves as a testament to the influence of advertising restrictions imposed on the gaming sector on the advertising volumes within the television market (Communications Commission, 2023).

RESPONSIBLE GAMBLING

Gambling is an activity that involves taking risks and relies on chance to determine its outcome. The frequency and intensity of gambling can vary among individuals, ranging from no involvement to high levels of participation. Recognizing the potential risks associated with gambling, many countries have implemented Responsible Gambling (RG) programs. These initiatives aim to promote safe and responsible gambling practices while mitigating the negative consequences that can arise from excessive or problematic gambling behaviors.

Responsible Gambling refers to a set of policies, practices, and initiatives designed to ensure that gambling activities are conducted in a manner that minimizes harm to individuals and society as a whole. The primary goals of RG programs are to prevent gambling-related problems, promote informed decision-making, and provide support and assistance to individuals who may be at risk or experiencing difficulties due to their gambling habits (Blaszczynski, 2004).

KEY COMPONENTS OF RESPONSIBLE GAMBLING PROGRAMS:

Public Awareness and Education: Responsible Gambling programs emphasize the importance of informed decision-making and aim to increase public awareness about the potential risks associated with gambling. This includes educating individuals about the odds, probabilities, and potential negative consequences of excessive gambling.

Player Protection Measures: RG programs often include player protection measures such as age verification processes to prevent underage gambling, self-exclusion programs that allow individuals to voluntarily exclude themselves from gambling activities, and spending limits to help individuals maintain control over their gambling expenditures.

Support and Treatment Services: To address gambling-related problems, RG programs provide access to support and treatment services for individuals and their families who may be affected by gambling addiction or other gambling-related issues. These services may include helplines, counseling, and referral programs to specialized treatment centers.

Collaboration with Industry: Responsible Gambling initiatives often involve collaboration between gambling operators, regulatory bodies, and relevant stakeholders. This collaboration aims to develop and enforce responsible gambling policies and practices within the industry. It may include measures such as advertising regulations, responsible marketing practices, and staff training on identifying and addressing potential gambling-related problems.

Given the intricate nature of gambling, the responsibilities and obligations of various stakeholders such as industry operators, healthcare and welfare providers, community groups, customers, and government agencies are vast. In 2004, the initial proposal by Blaszczynski introduced the Reno Model, which serves as the pioneering strategic framework for guiding Responsible Gambling (RG) strategies. The Reno Model framework offers a structured approach for adopting, implementing, and evaluating scientifically validated initiatives and methods within RG programs. Through best practices, it has been determined that the Reno Model emphasizes the implementation of five key strategies: Self-exclusion; Study of gambling habits to create systems capable of detecting sensitive events; Limit Setting; Specific RG; Features Employees training.

Differentiating responsible gambling from rehabilitation programs targeting problem gamblers is essential. Professionals involved in public health programs, includ-

ing counseling and other healthcare services, retain the responsibility of addressing and providing treatment for individuals who have experienced harm because of gambling (Blaszczynski, 2004).

Responsible gambling is rooted in the principle of informed choice and regarding gambling as a personal decision. This principle aligns with human rights policies and emphasizes that individuals have the autonomy to decide whether to engage in gambling activities. These decisions are shaped by a series of choices made by individuals with access to pertinent information. Informed choice guarantees individuals the freedom to determine their participation in gambling based on accurate and unbiased information. By providing participants with relevant and evidence-based information, the aim is to assist them in making well-informed decisions (Blaszczynski, 2004).

While analyzing the strategies of Georgian gambling providers, the direction of RG is also starting to develop. However, only a limited number of companies embrace the principles of the Reno Model and recognize the significance of fostering positive customer attitudes towards gambling, even from a business or commercial perspective. It is crucial to note that the involvement in promoting responsible gambling extends beyond the industry itself, encompassing individuals and society.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, gambling-related risks and problem gambling are important issues that require attention from policymakers, researchers, and society. This article has explored various aspects of gambling, focusing on the context of Georgia while also drawing insights from global approaches to responsible gambling. Different forms of gambling, such as lotteries, sports betting, electronic gambling machines (EGMs), and casino games, have varying associations with problem gambling. However, it is the level of involvement in gambling activities that has a greater impact on behavior than the specific type of game played. This highlights the importance of considering the overall gambling engagement of individuals when addressing problem gambling. Advertising plays a significant role in promoting gambling and shaping people's perceptions. Marketing strategies employed by the industry often emphasize luck and the allure of winning, which can lead to unrealistic expectations and excessive gambling behavior. It is essential for regulatory authorities to closely monitor and regulate gambling advertising to ensure responsible

messaging and protect vulnerable individuals. In Georgia, the gambling industry has experienced significant growth in recent years. To mitigate the adverse effects of gambling on society, legislative provisions have been implemented, including restrictions on online gambling for certain groups and limitations on gambling advertising. These measures aim to promote responsible gambling practices and protect individuals from harm. Future research and analysis are crucial to understanding the complexities of gambling behavior and developing effective strategies for responsible gambling. Comprehensive studies combining statistical indicators with social research can provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of gambling regulations and reforms. Ongoing monitoring of the Georgian gambling market and its impact on society will help policymakers make informed decisions and implement targeted interventions. Furthermore, preventive measures should focus on early detection and screening of problem gambling, particularly among vulnerable populations such as adolescents and individuals with a family history of gambling issues. Education and awareness campaigns can play a vital role in promoting responsible gambling behaviors and reducing the stigma associated with seeking help for gambling problems. In summary, addressing gambling-related risks and promoting responsible gambling practices require a multifaceted approach that involves regulatory measures, responsible advertising practices, and comprehensive research. By understanding the complexities of gambling behavior and implementing evidence-based interventions, societies can minimize the harm caused by problem gambling and create a safer gambling environment for individuals.

LIMITATIONS

Overall, while the article provides valuable insights, its limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings and considering their implications. Firstly, the research is based on a single study, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Additional studies with larger sample sizes and diverse populations are needed to confirm the results and establish broader applicability. Secondly, the study design is cross-sectional, which limits the ability to establish causal relationships between variables. Longitudinal studies that track participants over time would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics and temporal associations involved.

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