

First global review highlights substantial lack of commitment to addressing gambling harm

November 7 2023



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Globally, governments are still not doing enough to address the health and well-being harm from gambling, according to a world first review led by the University of Glasgow.

The article, "Public health approaches to [gambling](#): A global review of legislative trends," [published](#) in *The Lancet Public Health*, found that although gambling harm is increasingly recognized in legislation around the world, there appears to be a lack of willingness among [policy makers](#) to address it in a meaningful way. There is also an overwhelming focus on controlling individual consumers, rather than controlling the gambling industry.

The review, which was undertaken in collaboration with the University of Helsinki-based Center for Research on Addiction, Control, and Governance, gathered data from countries that have introduced major legislative changes to gambling between 2018 and 2021.

Project Investigator Dr. Daria Ukhova, of the University of Glasgow's School of Social and Political Sciences, said, "Harmful gambling is widely recognized as a health and well-being issue, with impacts that can be devastating, including heightened risk of suicide attempts and high levels of indebtedness. We see from other areas, such as tobacco and alcohol, that effective prevention of harm often requires strict control of the industry and of the environment in which these products are provided. Our review suggests that this learning has not yet translated into action on gambling harm.

"Our findings show that even in contexts where gambling harm have been recognized at the legislative level, the overarching focus has been on individual-level harm rather than harm to others and/or wider social and economic harm. Relatedly, the foci of harm prevention policies have been on 'encouraging' individual control and responsibility, rather than on regulating gambling industry practices and product design."

The Center for Research on Addiction, Control, and Governance at the University of Helsinki were the first experts to recommend a global approach be taken to reviewing gambling legislation.

Dr. Virve Marionneau from the University of Helsinki said, "A comparative understanding of different legislative and regulatory approaches to gambling harm is crucial. Gambling causes severe harm globally, but policy responses to this harm have been scattered and unstandardized. Our findings support policymakers by providing recommendations for long-term policy directions, interjurisdictional collaboration, and [strategic planning](#) on how to address gambling as a public health issue in national legislation and globally."

Examples from other countries are particularly important in situations of important legislative change, a process that is lengthy and complex.

Dr. Ukhova said, "Once enshrined, gambling legislation can be incredibly difficult to change. The policy cycle is long and can last for years; legislation that is being written today could still be in place for at least another decade.

"Ultimately, if governments are serious about addressing the [health issues](#) that arise from gambling harm, they need to stop paying lip service to making changes and get serious about adopting systemic solutions to how gambling is provided—and promoted—in their respective countries."

This research is intended to inform The Lancet Public Health Commission on Gambling, which aims to set progressive agenda to guide action to reduce gambling harm and protect people from this harm. In the U.K., this is backed by evidence from recent [research](#) linking difficulties in gambling to heightened suicidality in [young adults](#), and into the impact of marketing on gambling behaviors.

More information: Daria Ukhova et al, Public health approaches to gambling: a global review of legislative trends, *The Lancet Public Health* (2023). [DOI: 10.1016/S2468-2667\(23\)00221-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667(23)00221-9)

Provided by University of Glasgow

Citation: First global review highlights substantial lack of commitment to addressing gambling harm (2023, November 7) retrieved 2 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-11-global-highlights-substantial-lack-commitment.html>

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