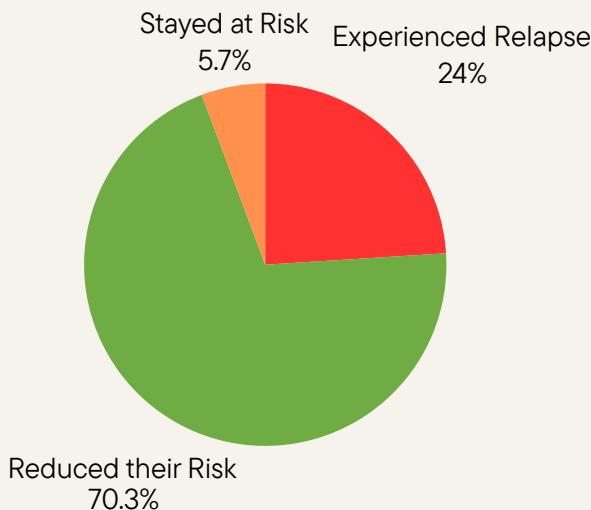




Understanding Gambling Relapse

Our Research

Many people who stop engaging in risky gambling behaviour eventually return to it; this is known as relapse. Gambling relapse has not been well studied in Aotearoa. This research set out to understand how to identify relapse and what factors may lead people back into risky gambling. We analysed data from the New Zealand National Gambling Study, a large, long-term survey that tracked gambling behaviours annually from 2012 to 2015, then again in 2020. Our focus was on 388 participants who had been identified as a current, or past, risky gambler in any of the first four data collection years. To examine relapse, we used the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI) - a standard questionnaire that scores gambling risk and places people into categories based on their answers. Because the PGSI includes various questions on gambling behaviour and harms (such as feelings of guilt or chasing losses), it also helped us explore which specific factors were linked to relapse. By looking at changes in participants' PGSI scores over time, we found:



One in Four Risky Gamblers Relapsed

Of the 388 adults followed over eight years, 24% experienced relapse - meaning around one in four returned to riskier gambling after a period of decreased gambling risk.

Most participants (70.3%) reduced their gambling risk and maintained this reduction, but a small group (5.7%) stayed at risk the entire time.

Changes in Certain PGSI Questions are Indicators of Relapse

Five out of the nine PGSI questions were significantly associated with relapse when their severity increased over time. These identified whether the person gambling was:



Being criticised for gambling by others



Feeling guilty about gambling



Betting more than they could afford



Chasing losses



Gambling larger amounts for excitement



Risk and Protective Factors of Relapse

Having previous problems with gambling was the strongest predictor of relapse. Spending more on gambling and efforts to stop gambling were also linked to higher risk of gambling relapse.

There were also some indications that ethnicity was associated with risk of relapse, particularly for Pacific peoples compared with European/Other peoples.

In contrast, having a higher quality of life and some exposure to a little to moderate gambling in childhood were associated with a reduced risk of relapse.

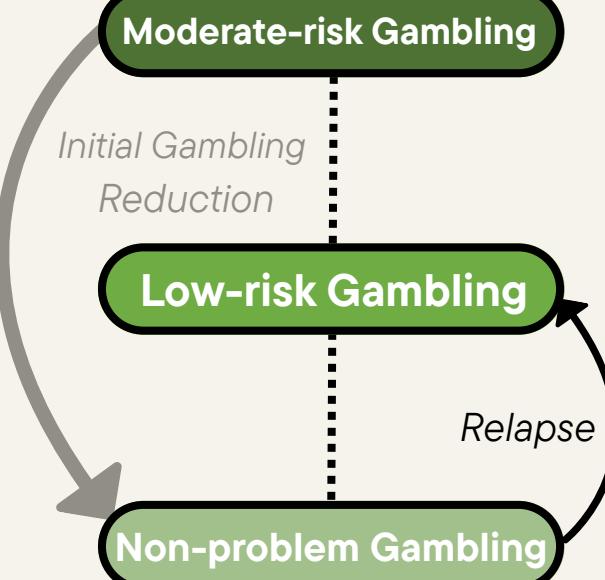


The Key Implications

- Based on the survey data, the prevalence of gambling relapse amongst risky gamblers in Aotearoa is 24%.
- Several risk and protective factors were identified for gambling relapse.
- An increase in PGSI risk level after a decrease is a valid way to identify relapse risk.
- Alongside changes in PGSI risk levels, some PGSI questions are useful supplementary indicators of risk of gambling relapse.

Below: Example of a moderate risk gambler becoming a non-problem gambler then relapsing into low risk gambling

Problem Gambling



Tracking PGSI Scores Over Time is a Good Way to Identify Relapse

A decrease in PGSI risk level followed by a later increase in risk level is a good indicator of risky gambling relapse. Also, some behaviours, such as: increased gambling frequency, expenditure after a decrease/stopping, or seeking help for gambling, could help to identify risk in conjunction with the changes in PGSI risk levels.

Acknowledgements

This research was funded by the Ministry of Health. It was a secondary data analysis of existing New Zealand National Gambling Study data. The authors gratefully acknowledge the original teams of staff who conducted that study over many years, and the many participants who continued to complete the survey year after year.