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# Covid-19 and its impact on gamblers, their families, and therapists.

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**Abstract:** This issue of the Journal of gambling issues, included 4 papers that focus on how Covid-19 effected problem gamblers. One paper is a systematic review, two papers use qualitative methodology to examine the impact of covid, and the fourth paper uses a combination of survey and open-ended questions to explore the impact of covid on treatment professionals. The results suggest that Covid-19 had a relatively positive effect on problem gamblers and their families, but many returned to gambling once the lockdown restrictions were relaxed.

**Keywords:** Gambling, Family, Gambler, Therapist, COVID-19.

This issue of the Journal of gambling issues, included 4 papers that focus on how Covid-19 effected problem gamblers. One paper is a systematic review, two papers use qualitative methodology to examine the impact of covid, and the fourth paper uses a combination of survey and open-ended questions to explore the impact of covid on treatment professionals.

Capitanucci et al., (2023) is a systematic review that examined how the lockdown during the pandemic resulted in a relatively positive impact on problem gamblers by "no craving, an overall decrease in gambling behaviours, and little switching from land-based to online gambling during the lockdown." Furthermore, family members "appreciated the immediate effects of their relatives' abstention" and reported "a better family climate with better relationships." The results suggest that measures that limit the accessibility of gambling have a strong potential to reduce the gambling related harm. However, it should be noted that Turner, et al., (2022) found a gradual return to problem gambling related helpline calls as the pandemic persisted as people gradually migrated to online forms of gambling.

Passarella et al., (2023) focused attention on affected family members of disordered gamblers and their vulnerability to economic and well-being-related damages from problem gamblers, and specifically how they were impacted during the Covid-19 pandemic. They report that there has been an improvement in family relationships during the lockdown period. Echoing a conclusion by Capitanucci et al., (2023) the main fear of affected family members during the pandemic, concerned "the time of reopening". Consistent with Capitanucci et al., (2023) the results suggest that environmental prevention due to external limitations (the lockdown) significantly reduced gambling and is an effective tool to limit gambling related harm.

Thomson & Mekoth, (2023) used qualitative methods to examines what happens when the casino re-open. While many gamblers benefitted from the closure of the casinos which forced millions of gamblers to stop casino gambling temporarily or to migrate to online gambling platforms. After the pandemic was largely under control and the casinos were reopened, many people returned to casino gambling. According to the authors, while many gamblers found coping during the pandemic closure difficult, they saved money, experienced financial stability, and paid attention to family and work. Nonetheless, they became restless and returned when casinos reopened. The main motive to return to gambling was to recover what they had previous lost suggesting they had not learned anything about the futility of chasing. The authors go on to describe how the participants were aware that regular gamblers never make money but were happy to gamble again and experienced satisfaction gambling. The authors explain their results in terms of learning theory. The authors also note that there was no major shift towards online gambling which the authors report was related to lack of technological knowledge, distrust of

online gambling sites, reluctance to gamble in the presence of families, and a lack of social interaction online.

Turner, et al., (2023) focused attention of the impact of Covid-19 on problem gambling counselling. Surveying how the pandemic impacted them in terms of stress and examined how they adapted to the pandemic in order to continue counselling problem gamblers during the pandemic. The counsellors reported "concerns over technological issues, privacy issues and problems with keeping clients engaged." There were also particular concerns about people with limited access to technology such as homeless people and seniors. The technology for remote counselling has not been adequately researched and they conclude that "there is a need for research to define best practices for remote methods of counselling."

Together these four papers provide a very interesting insight into gambling problems. The drop in gambling during the pandemic clearly support the availability view of gambling problems. However, the results also report relatively little migration to online gambling. In three of these papers, it is clear that during the pandemic, problem gamblers stopped gambling, and experienced some benefit from the absence of gambling venues. This contrasts somewhat with the field of substance abuse where mixed results have been reported with some studies finding increases in alcohol and drug consumptions during the pandemic, and other studies showing a decrease (Acuff et al., 2022; Layman et al., 2022; Roberts et al., 2021).

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