

research snapshot

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Casino bus tours can increase the chance of problem gambling among older adults

What this research is about

The gambling industry uses various marketing tactics to target older adults. One common tactic is to organize bus tours to visit casinos. Aside from increasing access to gambling, bus tours present casino visits as a safe and socially acceptable leisure activity. To date, little is known about the role of casino bus tours in problem gambling among older adults.

Problem gambling occurs when an individual gambles more than he or she can afford and results in stress and other negative consequences. These consequences may include debts and relationship troubles. Furthermore, problem gambling is often associated with other mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety. This study examined whether the use of bus tours could increase the risk of problem gambling among older adults over the age of 55. It also explored if the use of bus tours differed by gambling and sociodemographic characteristics.

What the researchers did

Participants were 1978 adults over the age of 55. They were invited to participate in a survey when entering or exiting one of seven gambling venues in Central and Southwestern Ontario, Canada. The gambling venues included six casinos and one racino (horse racing track with slot machines and table games).

The survey asked participants if they had used bus tours to visit the gambling venue in the past year, the number of past year visits, money spent per visit, and how often they played slot machines. It included the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI) to assess how severe participants' gambling problems were. The

What you need to know

Organizing bus tours to visit casinos is a common strategy used by the gambling industry to target older adults. This study examined if casino bus tours could increase the risk of problem gambling among older adults. It also looked at whether the use of bus tours differed by gambling and sociodemographic characteristics. Participants were 1978 adults over the age of 55.

Results showed that older adults who used bus tours in the past year were more likely to have problem gambling compared to those who did not use bus tours. Use of bus tours was associated with more frequent gambling on slot machines, more visits to a gambling venue in the past year, and lower spending per visit. Older adults who used bus tours were more likely to be female, retired, and foreign born. These results support the need to regulate how the gambling industry uses bus tours and other tactics to target older adults.

survey also collected sociodemographic information (e.g., sex, age, marital status).

The researchers first compared the sociodemographic and gambling characteristics between older adults who did and did not use bus tours. They then examined which characteristics would predict a higher chance of problem gambling.

What the researchers found

Women were more likely to have used bus tours in the past year to visit a gambling venue compared to men. Bus tours were also more common among older

adults who were retired compared to older adults who were employed, and among those who were foreign born compared to the native born. Rates of bus tour use were particularly high among foreign born individuals who were of Asian or East Indian backgrounds. In addition, bus tours were more common among older adults who played slot machines on a monthly or more frequent basis and older adults who were problem gamblers. Use of bus tours was associated with more visits to a gambling venue in the past year, but lower spending per visit.

Older adults who used bus tours in the past year were almost twice as likely to experience problem gambling than those who did not use bus tours. Several other sociodemographic and gambling characteristics also predicted problem gambling. In terms of sociodemographic characteristics, older participants were less likely to be problem gamblers than younger participants. Those who were separated or divorced were more likely to be problem gamblers than those who were married. Being foreign born also increased the chance of problem gambling compared to being native born. In terms of gambling characteristics, older adults who played slot machines and those who spent more money per visit on gambling were more likely to be problem gamblers.

How you can use this research

The findings of this study support the need to regulate how the gambling industry has used bus tours and other tactics to target older adults. Policy makers, researchers, and intervention providers should collect more information on the size and scope of casino bus tours and the impact of bus tours on older adults. In particular, there is a need to examine if casino bus tours expose some groups of older adults to greater gambling harm than others.

About the researchers

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