

5F-1

From policy to practice: Assessing the impact of electronic gaming machines regulations on harmful gambling behaviour

*ELISA BENEDETTI*¹, *ALESSIO LACHI*², *GABRIELE LOMBARDI*³,
*SABRINA MOLINARO*¹

¹National Research Council of Italy

²Saint Camillus International University of Health and Medical Sciences

³University of Florence

E-mail: elisa.benedetti@cnr.it

Background: Electronic gaming machines (EGMs) are among the most harmful form of gambling. The widespread availability of EGMs has been linked to increased gambling activity and a rise in harmful gambling. However, it remains unclear whether limiting the availability and accessibility of EGMs is effective in reducing gambling harms at the population level. We investigate those issues leveraging on the natural experiment of the Piedmont region in Italy, which in 2018 set limits on the location and operating hours of EGMs. *Methods:* Data from the Gambling Adult Population Survey conducted in 2018 and 2022 were combined with information regarding the implementation of the policy in Piedmont municipalities and data on EGMs from the national monopoly holder. Our analysis uses a difference-in-differences design, which is appropriate given that only some municipalities in the region implemented the policy, with each setting different operating time limits for EGMs. Sensitivity analyses were conducted to explore possible substitution effects towards bordering regions and online gambling. *Results:* Our findings reveal that policies aimed at reducing the operating hours of EGMs were effective in decreasing harmful gambling behavior in the population, but only when a minimum daily operational suspension of 11 hours was implemented. No significant effect was instead observed from setting location limits which prevent EGMs to be located close to "sensitive" places, such as schools or ATMs. Furthermore, no substitution effect was found either concerning possible movements toward bordering regions without EGM restrictions or online gambling. *Conclusion:* While restricting EGM availability can help mitigate harmful gambling, it requires coordinated efforts across different levels of government to ensure uniform policy implementation, along with individual-level policies and consideration of diverse gambling products. In this study, physical gambling emerged as the most significant driver of harmful behaviours, since the interaction with online gambling does not appear to undermine the efficacy of the policy. However, given the growing prevalence of online gambling, this type of intervention could be adapted to online platforms by limiting the allowed connection time.

Keywords: harmful gambling behaviour, EGMs, gambling policies, cross-sectional 29 survey, difference-in-difference model, sensitivity analysis