

research snapshot

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The narratives of women who experience intimate partner violence due to their partner's gambling disorder

What this research is about

Gambling is a popular activity in the UK, with around 73% of adults having gambled in the past year. The Internet has driven the rapid growth of online gambling. The increase in gambling opportunities can lead to more people developing a gambling disorder and suffering gambling-related harm.

People with gambling disorders may commit crime to fund their gambling or to cover financial shortfalls. Gambling disorders are also linked to violent acts. Intimate partner violence (IPV) describes abuse or aggression against current or former intimate partners. There is evidence that people with gambling disorders are more likely to be perpetrators and victims of IPV, compared to the general population.

Little research has explored the dynamics underlying the link between gambling disorders and IPV. In this study, the researchers explored coercive and controlling behaviours used by men with gambling disorders and the impacts on their female partners.

What the researchers did

The researchers recruited people with experience of IPV due to an intimate partner's gambling through two means. The first was by sending emails to people who had previously participated in a survey study. The second was by advertising on a forum set up by family members to support other family members affected by gambling. In total, 26 people agreed to be interviewed. All were female.

The interviews took place via the telephone. During the interviews, participants told their stories of gambling, experience of harm, relationships, coping, and support. The interviews were audio-recorded and

What you need to know

High rates of intimate partner violence (IPV) have been reported in people with gambling disorders. Economic abuse is a form of IPV in which the person with a gambling disorder controls and exploits family finances as well as their partner's finances. The researchers interviewed 26 women who experienced IPV due to a male partner's gambling. They identified that the IPV perpetrated by men with gambling disorders was often instrumental in nature. Specifically, men with gambling disorders used coercive and controlling behaviours in three main ways. The first was to access money for gambling. The second was to hide gambling behaviour from others. The third was to justify gambling and abusive behaviours and shift the blame onto their female partners.

transcribed. The researchers analyzed the interview data to explore and form a theory on why gambling disorders manifest in acts of IPV.

What the researchers found

The researchers found that the IPV was often instrumental in nature. Specifically, men with gambling disorders used coercive and controlling behaviours in three main ways.

1) Access money for gambling

A small number of women said they had little control over how household money was used. Other women said they had some control, but mentioned how their partner would spend all his money on gambling. Afterwards, their partner would seek to use household funds or their personal funds to gamble.

Economic abuse was common in the women's stories. They mentioned how their male partner would steal and misuse household money and even property. For example, one woman said her husband re-mortgaged their house and spent all the money on gambling. Some women were coerced into taking out loans and credit cards. One woman talked about being forced to take on two jobs to cover financial needs.

When the women tried to take control over household finances, this would result in a range of coercive and intimidating behaviours by their partner. Most women mentioned verbal and emotional violence, and some also mentioned physical violence. The economic abuse sometimes left the women with no money for daily needs like food and utilities. It also reduced their ability to leave the relationship.

2) *Hide gambling behaviour from others*

The women stated that their partner used coercive and controlling behaviours to hide his gambling and IPV from family members, friends and others. These included verbal attacks and threats of physical violence so that the women would not reveal his gambling to others. The abuse, along with the stigma and shame for being a victim and for their partner's gambling problems, prevented the women from seeking out either formal or informal help.

3) *Justify gambling and abusive behaviours*

The women reflected on how their partner used verbal attacks to justify his gambling and abusive behaviours. The verbal abuse was also used to shift the blame and convince the women that they deserved the violence. For example, one woman said she was led to believe her partner's gambling was the result of his efforts to make money and meet her desires for a house and other things. Another woman thought her husband's gambling was a consequence of her failings as a wife and a mother. She sought to avoid his belittling by being a "perfect" wife.

How you can use this research

This study suggests that gambling disorders can lead to or worsen acts of IPV. It also highlights gender inequality in gambling and associated harm. The findings could inform gambling help services, victim

support services, and criminal justice agencies. Professional training and development could be given to ensure that key service staff know how to identify, support and, where appropriate, intervene.

Public health campaigns could reduce the shame and stigma associated with gambling problems and encourage help-seeking. Future research could explore gambling-related IPV experienced by men and by people with gambling disorders. Research could also explore IPV that occurs in same sex relationships.

About the researchers

James Banks is affiliated with the Department of Law and Criminology at Sheffield Hallam University in Sheffield, UK. **Jaime Waters** is affiliated with the School of Law at the University of Sheffield in Sheffield, UK. For more information about this study, please contact James Banks at J.Banks@shu.ac.uk.

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