

Stigmatization of gambling disorder, alcohol use disorder, and internet use disorder: An experimental vignette study

What this research is about

Stigmatization is a social phenomenon. It involves labelling people with a specific condition as being different and applying negative stereotypes to them. This is followed by separation, leading to discrimination and status loss. Stigmatization affects people with mental disorders and is mentioned as one of the reasons why people do not seek help. Stigmatization can lead to self-stigmatization, as people with mental disorders come to accept and agree with the negative stereotypes held against them. This can negatively affect their self-esteem, self-worth, and physical and mental health.

Gambling disorder refers to a pattern of repetitive or recurrent gambling behaviour that leads to significant harm. People with gambling disorder experience a loss of control over their gambling. Gambling disorder is among the most stigmatized mental health problems. The aim of this study was to examine stigmatization of gambling disorder in Germany and how it might compare to stigmatization of alcohol use disorder and internet use disorder.

What the researchers did

The researchers conducted an experimental vignette study in 2023. Adults living in Germany were recruited for the study through social media platforms or clickworker.de, a platform where people register to complete tasks or surveys for payment.

In the online survey, participants were randomly assigned to one of four vignettes. The vignettes described either a male or a female with gambling disorder, alcohol use disorder, internet use disorder, or mild depressive symptoms (as a control

What you need to know

This article presents a scoping review of the use of routinely collected data (RCD) in research on gambling harm. Specifically, the researchers examined the nature and extent of existing studies on gambling harm using RCD; how datasets are linked; how gambling harm is defined; and the quality of the evidence. This article is important because it reviews the use of RCD and data linkage methods to better understand and respond to gambling-related harm. This approach can increase statistical power because of the larger sample sizes often involved in RCD. It provides important opportunities for identifying potential risk or protective factors and evaluation of treatment effects. The researchers noted gaps and limitations in current gambling research with RCD and suggested directions for future studies to help inform public health interventions and policy.

condition). The survey also included the following measures:

- The Social Distance Scale to measure how willing participants would be to socially interact with the person described in the vignette.
- The Devaluation-Discrimination Measure to indirectly assess perceptions of stigma towards the person in the vignette. This measure uses statements starting with "Most people think..."
- The Emotional Reactions Scale to measure anger, anxiety, and sympathy towards the person in the vignette.
- The Negative Stereotypes: Blame, Dangerousness and Unpredictability scale to measure negative stereotypes, including how

dangerous and blameworthy the person in the vignette was for their condition.

- The Continuum and Differentness Beliefs scale to assess the extent that participants believed the person in the vignette was different from others, and their agreement that the condition occurred on a continuum (e.g., “To some extent, most people will have problems similar to those of X”).
- The Familiarity with Mental Illness Scale to measure familiarity with mental disorders. Participants answered if they or someone in their family or social network had received treatment for a mental health disorder, or were in contact with someone affected by a mental health disorder through work.

What the researchers found

The final sample consisted of 2,052 participants. Among them, 50.4% identified as male, 49.0% as female, and 0.6% as gender diverse. The average age was 40.7 years old. Most participants reported having a high educational level and working full time.

Stigmatization was higher when a male first name was used than when a female first name was used, regardless of the condition. Overall level of stigmatization did not differ significantly between gambling disorder and alcohol use disorder. But the two conditions differed on certain aspects of stigmatization. On the one hand, blame and anger were higher for gambling disorder than for alcohol use disorder. Sympathy was also lower for gambling disorder. These results suggest that gambling disorder may be seen as more of a character flaw, with expectations that people should have their gambling under control. On the other hand, desire for social distance was lower for gambling disorder than for alcohol use disorder. This result suggests that people may see gambling disorder as posing fewer negative consequences for the social environment.

Both gambling disorder and alcohol use disorder elicited more stigmatization than internet use disorder and the control condition. But internet use disorder was also stigmatized when compared to the control condition.

How you can use this research

This research can inform anti-stigma efforts for addictive disorders like gambling and alcohol use disorders.

About the researchers

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About Greo Evidence Insights

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