

Campaigning experiences of people bereaved by gambling-related suicide

What this research is about

Gambling is linked to harmful consequences. The most severe harm of gambling is suicide. People who are bereaved by gambling-related suicide have called for regulatory changes. Many family members become involved in campaigning for changes at the individual, social, or political level. The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of those involved in campaigning for gambling regulatory changes due to their bereavement.

What the researchers did

The researchers recruited four adults who had lost a close relative to gambling-related suicide and had current or previous experience of campaigning in response to their loss. Two of these participants were identified and recruited through their social media presence (Twitter/X, Facebook). The researchers also emailed support groups and professionals working with the target demographic. Participants completed semi-structured one-on-one interviews, either in person or online.

What the researchers found

Two of the participants were fathers who lost an adult son. One participant was a husband who lost his wife. One participant lost his brother. As far as the participants knew, their loved ones only engaged in legal gambling activity. The researchers identified four themes from the interviews: (1) relationship before the suicide; (2) engagement with media; (3) emotional impacts of campaigning; and (4) relationship after the suicide.

Relationship prior to the suicide: All four participants described having a close relationship with their loved one before the suicide. Although participants felt that they had an open and

What you need to know

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of people bereaved by gambling-related suicide who were involved in campaigning for gambling regulatory changes. The researchers interviewed four adults who had lost a close relative to gambling-related suicide and had current or previous experience of campaigning in response to their suicide loss. The researchers identified four themes: (1) relationship before the suicide; (2) engagement with media; (3) emotional impacts of campaigning; and (4) relationship after the suicide. The findings show that activism can help create a continuing bond between family members and their lost loved ones.

communicative relationship with their loved one, they were not always aware of the gambling-related harm that their family member suffered. Three participants were aware of their loved one's gambling difficulties prior to the suicide. Even when gambling led to an erosion of trust, they described a desire to face the challenges together with their loved one.

Engagement with media: Participants saw engagement with the mainstream media as a way to reach a wider audience with their campaigns. But some participants felt that the media's emphasis on their personal stories was intrusive. This resulted in anger as well as a more careful and selective approach with any further media collaboration.

Working with the media sometimes involved a quid pro quo, where participants shared personal stories to get their campaign points across. Participants also criticized the media for presenting gambling as an innocent leisure activity.

Participants discussed how their engagement with media sometimes resulted in rebuttals from politicians, gambling industry representatives, and members of the public. These counterarguments often supported the idea of individual responsibility, which challenged and downplayed the participants' belief that gambling was the cause of the suicide.

Emotional impacts of campaigning: Participants experienced a range of emotional impacts from campaigning. Some participants still felt strong negative feelings connected with their loved one's suicide, even if their campaigning was successful. Other participants felt joy and satisfaction that their campaigning could help in preventing future gambling-related suicides.

Relationship following the suicide: Three participants described feeling an ongoing connection with their loved one after the suicide. They felt that campaigning on behalf of their loved one helped to maintain their bond even after the suicide.

The researchers discuss these findings through the lens of sense-making. Making sense of the loss is critical to the grieving process. Participants' activism and campaigning provided them with knowledge of harmful gambling industry practices, which supported their ability to make sense of their loss. Furthermore, activism could help create a continuing bond following the suicide loss.

How you can use this research

Mental health professionals can use this research to better understand the emotional and psychological experiences of those bereaved by gambling-related suicides.

About the researchers

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About Greo Evidence Insights

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