

research snapshot

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Are problem gambling and problem gaming more common in elite athletes?

What this research is about

Past research has found that playing competitive team sports increases the risk of addictive behaviours. Thus, athletes in competitive team sports may be at increased risk of problem gambling and video gaming.

There are a few reasons why playing competitive team sports may be a risk factor for problem gambling and video gaming. First, there have been increased gambling marketing in sports and gambling operators are usually sponsors of national level sports. Secondly, elite athletes are typically young adults, and problem gambling is more prevalent in that age group in general. Finally, athletes often have competitive personality traits which may be associated with problem gambling and gaming.

The current study explored how common problem gambling and gaming behaviours were among elite athletes in Sweden. It also examined whether these problem behaviours might be related to type of sport (team or individual sports) and other potential risk factors.

What the researchers did

Participants were 352 Swedish elite athletes who applied for a scholarship for university studies. All participants had a history of representing the national team in their sports.

Participants completed an online survey. The survey captured participants' age, gender, and type of sport they played (i.e., team or individual). The survey assessed problem gambling using the NODS-CLiP, and problem gaming using the Game Addiction Scale for Adolescents (GASA). The survey assessed hazardous alcohol drinking using a shortened version of the

What you need to know

This study explored problem gambling and video gaming in Swedish elite athletes. Participants were 352 individuals who had participated in national team in their sport and applied for a scholarship for university studies. The rate of problem gambling was 7% among the participants. This rate was somewhat higher than that in the general population in Sweden. Problem gambling was much more common in male athletes than in female athletes; 14% of male athletes had problem gambling compared to 1% of female athletes. The rate of problem gaming was 2% among the participants. This rate was similar to that in the general population. Elite athletes with gambling problems were more likely to have gaming problems compared to those without gambling problems.

Alcohol Use Disorder Identification Test (AUDIT-C). The survey also asked whether a participant had sought treatment for a mental health problem.

The researchers analyzed how common problem gambling and gaming were among the participants. The researchers also analyzed which characteristics were related with problem gambling and gaming.

What the researchers found

Among the 352 elite athletes, 7% had problem gambling. This rate was somewhat higher than the rate reported in the general population in Sweden. Problem gambling was much more common among male elite athletes than female elite athletes; 14% of

male elite athletes and only 1% of female elite athletes had problem gambling.

Among the elite athletes, 2% had gaming problems. This rate was similar to the rate of problem gaming reported in the general population. About 4% of male elite athletes and 1% of female elite athletes had gaming problems.

Elite athletes who had gambling problems were more likely to be male and have gaming problems than elite athletes without gambling problems. However, the two groups did not differ in any other ways (i.e., by age, type of sport, hazardous alcohol drinking, or history of seeking treatment for a mental health issue).

How you can use this research

The findings suggest that male athletes, regardless of the type of sport they play, may be at risk of problem gambling. Sports organizations and federations could develop and apply rules about gambling marketing and sponsorship in competitive sports to prevent the exposure of young male athletes to gambling. Clinicians may wish to screen elite athletes for problem gambling and video gaming and refer to treatment if required.

About the researchers

Anders Håkansson is affiliated with the Faculty of Medicine at Lund University in Lund, Sweden. **Göran Kenttä** and **Cecelia Åkesdotter** are affiliated with the Swedish School of Sport and Health Sciences in Stockholm, Sweden. Göran Kenttä is also affiliated with the School of Human Kinetics at the University of Ottawa in Ontario, Canada, and the Swedish Sport Federation in Sweden. For more information about this study, please contact Anders Håkansson at anders_c.hakansson@med.lu.se.

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