

Exploring how being an affected other is related to experiencing various harms due to another person's gambling

What this research is about

One person's gambling problems can affect other people they are close with, like their immediate family members, friends, and distant relatives. Harms experienced by affected others may include poor physical and mental health, substance use, and their own gambling problems.

Most research on the harms experienced by affected others have looked at harms at a single point in time. This does not provide information about the long-term impacts of a person's gambling on other people (the affected others).

In this study, the researchers looked at whether being an affected other is related to experiencing various harms. They also looked at whether the harm experienced differs depending on the specific relationship an affected other has to the person who gambles.

What the researchers did

The researchers collected data from people between 18 and 75 years of age who were living in Finland and spoke Finnish. They recruited these participants through Norstat, a data collection company. Data were collected across 8 timepoints, from Spring 2021 to Fall 2024. There were 1,530 participants when the study started in Spring 2021, and 824 responded up until the last timepoint.

Participants completed an online survey at each timepoint. At the first timepoint, they were asked whether someone close to them had ever experienced gambling problems. At all subsequent timepoints, they were asked whether someone close to them had experienced gambling problems in the past 6 months. They were also asked to indicate their

What you need to know

One person's gambling problems can affect other people they are close with, like their immediate family members and friends. In this study, the researchers looked at whether being an affected other is related to experiencing various harms. The researchers collected data from Finnish adults between Spring 2021 and Fall 2024. Participants indicated whether someone close to them had ever experienced gambling problems and what their relationship to this person was. They also answered questions about their own mental health, gambling problems, and alcohol use.

Being an affected other to a person with gambling problems was not related to psychological distress or problematic alcohol use. However, having a parent, grandparent, sibling, or close friend with gambling problems was related to a higher likelihood that participants themselves had gambling problems. Over a 1-year period, having a close family member with gambling problems was related to a lower likelihood that participants themselves had problems with gambling. The findings suggest that having a close family member or friend with gambling problems can influence one's own gambling behaviour.

relationship to this person (e.g., father, mother, sibling, partner). They could report multiple options.

At each timepoint, participants completed the following questionnaires:

- The 5-item Mental Health Inventory (MHI-5) to assess psychological distress (e.g., symptoms of depression and anxiety) in the past month.

- The Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI) to assess participants' own gambling problems.
- The 3-item Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test-Consumption (AUDIT-C) to assess problematic alcohol use.
- The Social and Emotional Loneliness Scale for Adults (SELSA) to assess social belonging.

What the researchers found

On average, participants were about 46.7 years of age at the first study timepoint. Just over half of the participants were male (50.3%). Across all timepoints, 8.9% of participants said they had someone close to them with gambling problems.

Being an affected other to a person with gambling problems was not related to psychological distress or problematic alcohol use. However, being an affected other to a person with gambling problems was related to participants' own gambling problems. This depended on participants' specific relationship to the person. Specifically, having a parent, grandparent, sibling, or close friend with gambling problems raised the likelihood that participants themselves also had problems with gambling. On the other hand, having a partner or child with gambling problems was not related to participants' own gambling problems.

The researchers then looked at these relationships separately between each timepoints. Over a 6-month period, having a parent, grandparent, sibling, or close friend with gambling problems was related to changes in participants' own gambling problems. Over a 1-year period, having a close family member with gambling problems was related to a lower likelihood that participants themselves had gambling problems. But having a close friend with gambling problems was no longer related to participants' own gambling problems over a 1-year period.

It should be noted that problematic alcohol use, psychological distress, and previous problems with gambling were more strongly related to one's own gambling problems than being an affected other.

How you can use this research

The findings suggest that having a close family member or friend with gambling problems can influence one's own gambling behaviour. Interventions for gambling problems could consider affected others in addition to the person with gambling problems.

About the researchers

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