Examining antidepressant prescription as a risk factor for gambling disorder using registry data in Norway

What this research is about

Depression is a common mental disorder. One strategy that people with depression may use to cope with or escape their negative mental state is through addictive behaviour like gambling. Previous research has found a link between depression and problem gambling, or gambling disorder. However, there are few studies that examine this link over time, and the findings of such studies are mixed.

This study examined the relationship between antidepressant prescriptions and the likelihood of developing gambling disorder over time. The researchers analyzed registry data in Norway over a period of 11 years (2008–2018). Due to the lack of data on depression diagnosis, antidepressant prescriptions were used as a proxy for depression diagnosis.

What the researchers did

The researchers used data from the Norwegian Patient Registry (NPR) and the Norwegian Prescription Registry (NorPD). NPR data were used to identify the study group (i.e., patients with gambling disorder) as well as the control group (i.e., patients with other illnesses). The two groups were then matched with their NorPD data, which provided information about antidepressant prescriptions.

There were 5,131 patients who were diagnosed with gambling disorder (study group) and 22,289 patients with other illnesses (control group). These patients were treated between January 2008 and December 2018 through Norwegian public specialized health-care services.

The inclusion criteria for the study group were (1) having a diagnosis of gambling disorder and (2) being at least 18 years old when they received the diagnosis. The control group was matched to the study group in terms of gender and age.

Antidepressant prescriptions were defined as all Anatomical Therapeutic Chemical (ATC) classifications beginning with “N06.”

What the researchers found

The study group was mostly composed of men (82%). The average age was 40 years. The control

What you need to know

This study examined the relationship between antidepressant prescriptions and the likelihood of developing gambling disorder over time. In doing so, the researchers used antidepressant prescriptions as a proxy for depression diagnosis. The researchers used data from the Norwegian Patient Registry (NPR) and the Norwegian Prescription Registry (NorPD) from 2008 to 2018. The study group included 5,131 patients who were diagnosed with gambling disorder. This group was compared to 22,289 patients with other illnesses (control group) who were matched in terms of age and gender.

A total of 1,488 patients were prescribed antidepressants before they received a gambling disorder diagnosis. Patients who were prescribed antidepressants were 2.8 times as likely to develop gambling disorder as those who were not prescribed antidepressants. Women were less likely to develop gambling disorder compared to men (odds of 0.78). For each passing year, the chance of developing gambling disorder went up by 1% for patients who were prescribed antidepressants.

group was also mostly composed of men (79%). The average age of this group was 41 years.

There were 1,488 patients who were prescribed antidepressants before they received a gambling disorder diagnosis. The median time between being prescribed antidepressants and receiving the gambling disorder diagnosis was 37 months. The median is the middle value when all the values in a dataset are arranged from smallest to largest.

Patients who were prescribed antidepressants were 2.8 times as likely to develop gambling disorder as those who were not prescribed antidepressants. Women were 0.78 times as likely to develop gambling disorder as men. Therefore, women were less likely to develop gambling disorder.

For each passing year, the chance of developing gambling disorder went up by 1% for patients who were prescribed antidepressants.

How you can use this research

This study can inform healthcare service providers and researchers. Early intervention and prevention strategies can be created to help reduce the chance of developing harmful gambling habits for people with depression.

About the researchers

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Citation

Kaur, P., Smith, O. R. F., Leino, T., Erevik, E. K., Griffiths, M. D., Goudriaan, A. E., & Pallesen, S. (2025). Antidepressant prescription as a risk factor for developing gambling disorder: A longitudinal registry-based study in Norway. *Journal of Behavioral Addictions, 14*(1), 457–464. https://doi.org/10.1556/2006.2024.00047

Study Funding

This study was funded by the Research Council of Norway. Open access funding was provided by the University of Bergen, Norway.

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