

research snapshot

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Offline social groups and social support may protect young people from problem gambling

What this research is about

Connecting with other people through social groups is important to maintaining health and well-being. Social groups are people who have similar interests and share relationships with one another. Social groups give people a sense of belonging and purpose, and can influence their decisions and behaviours. Nowadays, people can be part of social groups on the Internet (online) or in person (offline).

When people feel they belong to a social group they desire, they develop a social identity. Social identity is how people see themselves based on their connection to their social group. Belonging to a peer group is important for young people because it helps them build their identity as they mature. It is also important that young people feel socially supported. Having social support may protect young people from making poor decisions, such as gambling too much.

Gambling has become a popular activity among young people in many countries. Gambling can be an exciting and entertaining activity. However, excessive gambling can lead to problem gambling. Problem gambling is repetitive gambling behaviour that leads to negative consequences, such as depression, anxiety, debt, and relationship problems. In this study, the researchers investigated how identifying with online and offline peer groups may be associated with gambling behaviour in American and Finnish young people. They also explored how social support may be related to social identity and protect young people from problem gambling.

What the researchers did

The researchers recruited young people aged 15-25 years old from the United States and Finland.

What you need to know

The researchers investigated how young people's social identity affects their risk of developing problem gambling behaviour. They also investigated the influence of social support. Participants were 1,212 young people from the United States and 1,200 young people from Finland. They were 15 to 25 years old. Participants completed an online survey called *YouGamble*. American and Finnish participants who identified with a primary offline peer group were less likely to have problem gambling behaviour, but only if they felt supported by their peer group. Finnish participants who identified with a primary offline peer group were more likely to have problem gambling behaviour if they felt they had no social support. These results show that focusing on offline peer groups and social support may be important in preventing problem gambling among young people.

Participants were 1,212 American and 1,200 Finnish young people. They completed an online survey called *YouGamble*. The survey included the South Oaks Gambling Screen (SOGS), which was used to assess problem gambling behaviour. The survey asked participants how strongly they identified with both offline and online peer groups. The survey also asked participants if they felt they had the social support of close ones when they needed it.

What the researchers found

Among both participants from the United States and Finland, males were more likely to have problem gambling behaviour than females. For both groups,

those who primarily identified with an offline peer group were less likely to have problem gambling behaviour. Participants from the United States who primarily identified with an online peer group were more likely to have problem gambling behaviour. This was not found for participants from Finland. Participants from the United States who felt supported by their peer group were less likely to have problem gambling behaviour. This was not found for young people from Finland.

Social support had an influence on the relationship between peer group identification and problem gambling. Young people who identified with an offline peer group were less likely to have problem gambling behaviour, but only if they felt supported by their peer group. The researchers observed this result among both American and Finnish participants. Among young people from Finland, those who identified with an online peer group were more likely to have problem gambling behaviour if they felt they had no social support. These findings suggest that social support affects whether young people in different social groups have problem gambling behaviour.

How you can use this research

Prevention service providers could use this research to include social support services in problem gambling prevention programs for young people. If young people feel socially supported, they may be less likely to develop gambling problems. Prevention programs could also educate young people about how the social group they belong to influences their choices and behaviour. Researchers could use this research to investigate if social support received from family or friends is better at protecting young people from problem gambling behaviour. More research is also needed to understand why online and offline social groups affect young people's gambling behaviour differently.

About the researchers

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Citation

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