

Public stigma towards Armed Forces personnel experiencing gambling-related harm

What this research is about

Gambling-related harm is a significant public health concern. Harm associated with gambling includes financial difficulties and relationship breakdown, among other negative effects. Gambling-related harm is met with public stigma. For example, people experiencing gambling-related harm are often viewed negatively, such as lacking in self-control and being aggressive. Stigma can act as a barrier that prevents people from seeking help.

Armed Forces (AF) personnel are at increased risk of gambling-related harm. This increased risk may be due to their unique service experiences, including exposure to traumatic events and extreme conditions, which may motivate them to gamble to cope with distress. There is little evidence on how the public perceives gambling-related harm in AF personnel.

This study looked at how military status (AF vs. non-AF civilian) influences public perceptions of gambling-related harm, as well as how gambling behaviour (harm vs. no harm) shapes these perceptions. It also looked at the role of empathy. As the public tends to hold AF personnel in high regard, they may express more empathy for AF personnel experiencing gambling-related harm compared to civilians.

What the researchers did

The researchers conducted an online experiment, where participants were randomly assigned to one of four vignettes. Participants were recruited through Prolific, an online crowdsourcing platform. Participants had to be 18 years or older and reside in

What you need to know

Gambling-related harm among Armed Forces (AF) personnel is a growing concern. Stigma is a significant barrier to seeking help for gambling-related harm. Thus, understanding public perceptions of gambling-related harm among AF personnel is crucial. The researchers recruited 386 adults living in the UK for an online experiment. Participants were presented with one of four vignettes. The vignettes featured either an AF service member or a civilian experiencing gambling-related harm or gambling without experiencing harm.

Participants perceived an AF service member experiencing gambling-related harm as more dangerous than a non-AF civilian experiencing gambling-related harm. Empathy did not differ between the AF and non-AF vignettes. Regardless of military or civilian status, participants expressed higher stigma when the vignette described a person experiencing gambling-related harm. These results show that public stigma towards gambling-related harm is strong and shaped by military status.

the UK. People with direct affiliation with the AF were excluded from the study.

In the experiment, participants were presented with one of four vignettes. The vignettes described a person experiencing gambling-related harm or gambling without experiencing harm. The person in the vignette was either an AF service member (described as a sergeant) or a civilian. The description of gambling behaviour that results in

harm was developed based on the DSM-5 criteria (e.g., prioritizing gambling over other responsibilities). The image accompanying the description showed a young adult White male dressed in civilian clothing or AF uniform.

The researchers measured stigma using the Attribution-9 questionnaire (AQ-9). The AQ-9 measures nine dimensions of stigma, such as blame, anger, pity, dangerousness, and avoidance. The researchers measured empathy using the Empathic Concern (EC) subscale of the Empathic Response Questionnaire. This subscale assesses how sympathetic, warm, moved, soft-hearted, compassionate, and tender people feel towards a person with a specific condition (in this case, experiencing gambling-related harm).

What the researchers found

A total of 386 participants completed the experiment. The sample consisted of 47.4% male, 52.1% female, and 0.5% identified as non-binary/other gender. The majority identified as White (84.5%). A small number of participants identified as Asian (8.5%), Black (3.6%), or other (3.4%). There were no significant demographic differences among participants assigned to different vignettes.

The researchers found that military status had an effect on public perceptions of gambling-related harm. Participants perceived an AF service member experiencing gambling-related harm as more dangerous than a non-AF civilian experiencing gambling-related harm. No significant differences were found in the other stigma dimensions. Contrary to expectation, empathy did not differ between the AF and non-AF vignettes.

The researchers found that, regardless of military or civilian status, participants expressed higher stigma when the vignette described a person experiencing gambling-related harm compared to when the vignette described a person gambling without experiencing harm. For example, they perceived a person experiencing gambling-related harm as more dangerous and expressed greater pity, fear, anger, and desire for distance.

How you can use this research

This research can be used to better understand public perceptions and stigma towards gambling-related harm among Armed Forces personnel. The results suggest the need for public education and other strategies to reduce stigma towards people experiencing gambling-related harm.

About the researchers

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