

Exploring the relationship between problem gambling and tobacco use, including heated tobacco products

What this research is about

Problem gambling and tobacco use/nicotine dependence occur together at high rates. Among people experiencing problem gambling, an estimated 41–60% use nicotine as well. Those who engage in both gambling and smoking at the same time typically have more severe problem gambling compared to those who do not smoke.

Heated tobacco products (HTPs) are relatively new tobacco products. Instead of burning the tobacco (e.g., smoking a cigarette), the device heats the tobacco to a high temperature without burning it. Although the relationship between conventional tobacco products and problem gambling is well-researched, the relationship between HTPs and problem gambling has not yet been examined.

In the current study, the researchers aimed to understand the relationship between the use of tobacco products, including HTPs, and problem gambling within the Japanese context.

What the researchers did

The researchers conducted a nationwide online survey of people in Japan who reported gambling in the past year. Participants self-reported their use of cigarettes and HTPs within the past 30 days.

Gambling was reported using two different measures. The first scale was a self-report measure of engagement with 10 types of gambling products (e.g., casino games, lottery, horse racing). This scale was based on the South Oaks Gambling Screen

What you need to know

People who experience problem gambling are more likely to report using tobacco products. Heated tobacco products (HTPs) are relatively new nicotine products where tobacco is heated instead of burned. The relationship between HTPs and problem gambling is currently unknown.

In the current study, people in Japan with a recent history of gambling reported their use of both HTPs and cigarettes, alongside problem gambling. Both cigarette smoking and use of HTPs were associated with problem gambling. People who used both cigarettes and HTPs were at greatest risk of problem gambling compared to those who did not smoke. The association of tobacco use with problem gambling was more pronounced in women, younger people aged 16–29 years, and older people aged 66 and above.

(SOGS). People who reported gambling within the past year were classified as having recently gambled. The second scale, the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI), measures the extent of problem gambling that a person experiences. Problem gambling in the context of this study was defined as a score of 8 or higher on the PGSI.

Participants also reported their sociodemographic characteristics. Traits typically associated with problem gambling that were accounted for in the analyses included sex, age, education, marital status,

self-rated health, alcohol use, and household income.

What the researchers found

The number of initial respondents to the survey totalled 32,000. After excluding those who might have answered the survey carelessly and those who did not gamble in the past year, 12,222 respondents remained.

The majority of participants were men (63.1%), had a high school education or less (56.4%), were married (63.0%), and reported good health (86.9%) and alcohol use (60.9%). The ages of participants ranged from 16–83 years, with people aged 46–65 years making up the largest group (34.5%).

According to the PGSI, 10.9% of participants were classified as experiencing problem gambling. Among this subset of participants, 13.8% reported exclusive cigarette use, 15.2% reported exclusive HTP use, and 41.9% reported dual use. Only 4.6% of those who experienced problem gambling reported not using tobacco products.

Regardless of product type, the use of tobacco products was associated with a higher risk of problem gambling. The odds of problem gambling were greatest among people who used both cigarettes and HTPs.

Among those who used tobacco products, problem gambling was more common in women compared to men. Young people aged 16–29 years had the greatest likelihood of problem gambling across all age groups. Additionally, people aged 66–83 years who smoked cigarettes and used HTPs had greater odds of experiencing problem gambling.

How you can use this research

The findings of this study suggest that there is a relationship between tobacco use, including HTPs, and gambling. Policy makers could consider combining gambling-related interventions and smoking cessation interventions. Additionally, clinicians may want to screen people who use tobacco products for problem gambling behaviours. Further studies are needed to clarify the causal relationship between tobacco use and problem gambling.

About the researchers

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