

research snapshot

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Guidelines to recognise and support someone with gambling problems

What this research is about

Gambling problems occur when a person struggles to limit the amount of money or time spent on gambling. Gambling problems can lead to serious consequences for the gamblers, as well as their family and friends. These include financial and legal troubles, health problems, and relationship stress. In many cases, family and friends are not aware of the extent of a person's gambling problems, or that a person is gambling at all. When family and friends are aware of gambling problems, their support can be important to recovery. The current study developed guidelines on how a concerned family member, friend or member of the public can recognise the signs of gambling problems and support a person to change their gambling. The study used the Delphi method to gather input from two groups of experts. The experts included people with lived experience of gambling problems and professionals with experience treating or researching gambling problems.

What the researchers did

The researchers used the Delphi expert consensus method to develop the guidelines. The Delphi method gathers expert opinions anonymously using online surveys. First, the researchers reviewed websites, books, and research articles for information on how to help someone with gambling problems. Based on their review, the researchers developed a survey that had 412 helping statements on how to recognise and support someone with gambling problems.

The researchers sent the survey to two expert panels for feedback. The first panel included 34 people with lived experience of gambling problems. They either had personal experience or knew someone close to them

What you need to know

The current study gathered expert feedback to develop guidelines for family members, friends or members of the public on how to recognise the signs of gambling problems and provide support. The guidelines include a list of warning signs that may be evident at home, at work, or when gambling. The guidelines provide information on how to talk to a problem gambler and how to encourage the person to change and seek help. The guidelines also describe what to do if the person is resistant or in denial of their gambling problems. Strategies are included on how manage crisis situations, such as suicide.

with gambling problems. The second panel included 32 professionals with experience treating people with gambling problems or researching gambling problems. The experts rated each of the helping statements on a scale from 1 ('should not be included') to 5 ('essential') according to whether they thought the statement should be included or not. The experts could also provide comments or suggestions for new statements in the first round.

The researchers sent a summary report to the experts with a list of helping statements that were endorsed, rejected, or needed to be re-rated. This allowed the experts to compare their rating with the panel's consensus rating, and consider whether to keep or change their answer when re-rating an item. The second round asked the experts to re-rate statements that had not been endorsed. The same process was used for the third round. After the third round, all statements that received an 'essential' or 'important'

rating from 80-100% of experts on both panels were used to draft the guidelines.

What the researchers found

There were 234 helping statements that had been endorsed by at least 80% of members of both expert panels. The researchers used these statements to draft the guidelines. The final guideline document is available at www.mhfa.com.au.

The guideline document includes 9 sections. The first section defines gambling problems and describes the association between mental health problems and gambling problems. The second section lists the motivations for gambling and gambling problems. The third section includes a list of the risk factors that contribute to the development of gambling problems. It also lists the warning signs of gambling problems. The fourth section provides strategies for how to bring up and talk about gambling problems in a non-judgemental way. The fifth section includes information about professional help and how to encourage a problem gambler to seek help. The sixth section includes suggestions for encouraging the problem gambler to change. The seventh section provides information about helping a person when they are resistant or in denial of their gambling problems. The eighth section lists strategies that a person can use to change their gambling and information on how to support someone through relapse. The last section provides information on what to do if the gambler is experiencing suicidal thoughts or behaviours, or if a family member or friend is concerned about their own or others' safety.

How you can use this research

Family, friends and co-workers can use the guidelines to recognise whether someone they know is having gambling problems. Public health and mental health organizations can offer training sessions based on the guidelines to improve the ability of family members, friends and co-workers to support problem gamblers. The guidelines can also be used to train mental health professionals who are not experts in gambling problems. This will help them to recognise and address gambling problems in their clients, and make referral to specialized treatment if necessary.

About the researchers

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Keywords

Gambling problems, consumers, caregivers, significant others, mental health first aid, signs of gambling problems

Gambling Research Exchange Ontario (GREO)

Gambling Research Exchange Ontario (GREO) has partnered with the Knowledge Mobilization Unit at York University to produce Research Snapshots. GREO is an independent knowledge translation and exchange organization that aims to eliminate harm from gambling. Our goal is to support evidence-informed decision making in responsible gambling policies, standards and practices. The work we do is intended for researchers, policy makers, gambling regulators and operators, and treatment and prevention service providers.

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