What this research is about

Problem gambling is defined as repetitive gambling behaviour that leads to negative consequences. Some of these consequences can be objectively reported and observed by others. These include diagnostic symptoms and financial losses. Other consequences are subjective and can only be described from the person’s point of view. Health-related quality of life (HRQoL) is a subjective experience. HRQoL reflects the impact of a condition, like problem gambling, on one’s daily life.

Two scales have been developed to measure HRQoL among people with problem gambling. Four areas of quality of life affected by problem gambling have been identified: interpersonal relationships, activities, physical health, and mental health. However, these scales were not developed with the input of gamblers themselves. Thus, this study explored HRQoL related to problem gambling from the perspective of adults at risk of problem gambling.

What the researchers did

Participants were 25 French adults who were currently or previously at risk of problem gambling. They participated in one of six focus groups. The focus groups included gamblers with a range of age, sex, current gambling status, type of gambling, and gambling problem severity.

The focus groups explored the impacts of problem gambling on quality of life and treatment from participants’ own point of view. The participants discussed the burdens they experienced due to problem gambling. The interviewers guided the discussions to focus on the four areas of quality of life identified in past research. They also guided the discussions to include three other areas typically explored in general quality of life research that could be relevant to problem gambling: living conditions, financial concerns, and medical care.

What the researchers found

The researchers identified seven areas of HRQoL that were impacted by problem gambling:

1) Loneliness. Participants felt that gambling cut them off from others. They also felt unable to cope with gambling alone. Participants described a vicious cycle: gambling caused loneliness and loneliness led to more gambling.

2) Financial pressure. Participants reported having financial harms that risked their family’s finances
and increased anxiety. Sometimes, they felt the need to sell their houses or commit crimes to fund gambling. Participants described chasing losses as the behaviour that risked their finances.

3) Relationships deterioration. Participants felt that gambling damaged their social, family, and intimate relationships. It caused them to spend less time with their family, neglect some of their family’s needs, and lose the trust of their family.

4) Feeling of incomprehension. Participants felt that others did not understand why they gambled. They also could not understand their own choices and gambling behaviour.

5) Preoccupation with gambling. Gambling became an obsession that prevented participants from fulfilling their responsibilities. It also caused them to lose a sense of time.

6) Negative emotions. Participants felt guilt, shame, anxiety, depression, and dark thoughts. Their gambling resulted in a loss of self-esteem.

7) Avoidance of helping relationships. Participants reported trying to hide their gambling and their loss of control from others. They thought of their problem gambling as a mental disorder and found it painful to ask for help.

Preoccupation with gambling, loneliness, feeling of incomprehension, and avoidance of helping relationships have not been mentioned in previous quality of life studies and may be specific to gambling.

How you can use this research

The findings could help treatment providers and researchers understand gamblers’ point of view on barriers that prevent them from seeking treatment. The findings also support the need to develop a HRQoL scale specific to problem gambling. This could allow researchers to reveal all of the negative impacts of problem gambling from gamblers’ perspective.

About the researchers

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Citation


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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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