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Treating problem gambling with a workbook and motivational interviews

What this research is about

Problem gambling refers to repetitive gambling behaviour that leads to problems such as financial and psychological distress. Unfortunately, only a small number of problem gamblers seek help. Self-help treatments have been suggested as a solution for low levels of help-seeking, but there is inconsistent evidence regarding the efficacy of self-help treatments for problem gambling. The aim of this study was to determine the efficacy of a new self-help treatment called "JEu me questionne" in a sample of French Canadians.

What the researchers did

The researchers randomly allocated 62 treatment-seeking gamblers to a treatment group or waitlist control group. All participants were 18 years of age or older. The treatment consisted of three motivational phone interviews with a therapist and a self-help workbook. The interviews were spread over the course of the 11 weeks and the workbook was to be completed at any pace. The workbook contained five chapters. The chapters covered gambling motivations and benefits to change, how to identify high-risk gambling situations and gambling related thoughts, how to set a treatment goal, and how to prevent relapse.

After 11 weeks and at one, six, and 12-month follow-ups, the participants completed surveys. The surveys assessed demographics, gambling behaviours, alcohol and drug use, anxiety, depression, and life satisfaction. Demographics included gender, age, marital status, education, employment, income, number of children, and place of origin. Gambling behaviours included problem gambling severity,

What you need to know

This experiment examined the efficacy of a self-help treatment for problem gambling. The treatment was provided over 11 weeks and consisted of a workbook and three motivational interviews. The results show reduction in problem gambling symptoms, gambling behaviours and consequences after 11 weeks of treatment. These reductions were maintained up to 12 months after treatment. This was the first study to report the efficacy of a self-help treatment program in sample of French Canadians. Both the workbook and the telephone interviews appeared to contribute to the success of the program. Therapists may want to offer self-help treatment if waiting lists for other treatments are too long.

gambling frequency, money and time spent gambling, confidence to control gambling, motives for seeking help, and treatment goals. The control group completed the same surveys while on the treatment waitlist. They were provided with treatment once the waiting period was over.

What the researchers found

The researchers observed a low drop-out rate and the majority of participants completed their workbooks by the end of the study. After 11 weeks of treatment there was a significant reduction in the number of problem gambling symptoms and gambling behaviours compared to the control group. Specifically, the number of participants diagnosed with problem gambling dropped by over 50%. Gambling frequency, time and money spent also were also reported less by participants. In addition,

participants believed their confidence to control their gambling improved and they reported fewer negative consequences as a result of gambling. For example, improvements in finances, quality of life, sleep and mood were reported. No further reduction in the above outcomes were observed at one, six and 12-months follow-up. Overall, participants reported they liked the treatment offered. Some of them offered no suggestions for improvement and others suggested changes to the workbook and adding more telephone support.

How you can use this research

As suggested by participants, therapists could consider offering more telephone support options for problem gambling. Therapists could also consider offering self-help options when other treatment waiting lists are too long. Researchers could build upon this study's findings by assessing the relevant contributions of the workbook and telephone interview components in order to find the most effective combination to treat problem gambling.

About the researchers

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