

knowledge snapshot



Understanding how gambling problems affect people who are homeless

What this article is about

The authors of this article reviewed research about people suffering from gambling harm and homelessness. Gambling harm refers to the negative consequences that people suffer from gambling. Homelessness describes people who do not have stable housing or are living on the streets. Some people who are homeless may suffer from multiple exclusion homelessness (MEH). MEH refers to people who are homeless and experience other types of disadvantage. These may include having been in jail, being addicted to drugs or alcohol, or involved in street activities like begging. People with MEH may not get the help they need. Gambling is not considered part of MEH, but may also affect whether people experience homelessness.

Evidence suggests that homeless people in the United Kingdom (UK) are much more likely to have gambling problems than the general public. There are two main factors that may increase a person's chance of suffering gambling harm or homelessness. These two factors are their characteristics and the environment they live in. For example, people who have impulsive characteristics may be more likely to suffer gambling harm. People who live in a city where the housing market is poor may be more likely to experience homelessness.

Gambling policies in the UK changed in 2005. The policy changes made it easier for people to gamble. Betting shops were usually located in areas where people who are homeless may frequent. It was estimated that almost half of all adults in Great Britain gambled in 2017. In this article, the authors explored how gambling problems affect people who are homeless.

Why is this article important?

Some evidence suggests that people who are homeless are much more likely to have gambling problems than the general public in the United Kingdom (UK). Gambling problems and homelessness are serious public health issues. In this article, the authors review research studies to identify how gambling problems affect people who are homeless. They also suggest how homeless support and gambling services could better support people who are homeless.

What was done?

The authors searched for research articles in online databases and printed sources. The articles must focus on gambling harms in adults experiencing homelessness. Only English language articles were included. The articles were published between 2007 and July 2017 in the UK and in other countries around the world. The authors summarized the results of the 20 articles into five main themes.

What you need to know

The researchers identified five main themes from the research articles. The themes are why people who are homeless go to gambling venues; the extent of gambling among people who are homeless; how likely gambling among homeless people is under-reported; if homeless people get help for their gambling; and how gambling affects them.

There is limited knowledge about why people who are homeless gamble. People who are homeless may go to gambling venues because they are relatively safe

places. Gambling venues provide a warm place to stay and to socialize with other people.

It is currently unknown how many homeless people in the UK gamble. Some evidence suggests that people who are homeless gamble more and have more gambling problems than the general public. It is possible that people who are homeless tend to stay in areas that have more gambling venues. As such, they are more likely to develop gambling problems.

Gambling rates among people who are homeless are probably higher than what researchers and practitioners report. This is because surveys that collect information about gambling only include information from people who live in a house or have a telephone. Surveys generally do not ask questions about people's living situation.

There is a lack of evidence about whether people who are homeless know about or use gambling services. A few studies suggest that most people are aware of gambling services, but few actually use those services. Some research suggests that support services do not focus on what people who are homeless need or want.

People who gamble too much may be more likely to suffer homelessness. People who are homeless may gamble illegally on games that are not regulated in their country, as a way to gain income. Some people may commit illegal acts, such as theft, to fund their gambling.

Who is it intended for?

This article is intended for homeless support service providers. The article suggests that homeless support service providers could screen people who are homeless for gambling problems. They could work with gambling prevention and treatment service providers to let more people know about gambling services. They could also create programs to treat people who are homeless for gambling problems.

This article is also intended for researchers. Researchers could investigate if women and men who are homeless suffer gambling problems in different ways. More research is needed to determine if people

who are homeless suffer gambling problems from gambling on cell phones and online. Policy makers could also create policies that ensure practitioners ask people who are homeless about their gambling behaviour.

About the researchers

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Citation

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About Gambling Research Exchange (GREO)

Gambling Research Exchange (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 safer 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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