

research snapshot

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Gender differences in healthcare use for mental health and substance use disorders

What this research is about

Problem gambling is defined as repetitive gambling behaviour that leads to negative consequences. Pathological gambling is a clinical diagnosis of severe problem gambling. It is more common among men than women. Pathological gambling often co-occurs with a range of other mental disorders. These include alcohol and substance use disorders, mood and anxiety disorders, and impulse control disorders.

Co-occurring mental disorders are more common among women with pathological gambling than men with pathological gambling. Women are also more likely than men to seek treatment and use healthcare services for mental disorders. However, women seek treatment for pathological gambling less often than men.

There is little research about whether there are differences in treatment-seeking and healthcare use between men and women with clinician diagnosed pathological gambling and co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders. The current study fills this research gap.

What the researchers did

The researchers used healthcare claims data from the Massachusetts All Payer Claims Database. The data covered claims from January 1, 2009 to June 30, 2013 for healthcare services provided by the 16 largest private commercial payers in Massachusetts, USA. The researchers examined data from 591 adult patients with pathological gambling. Their diagnosis was based on the International Classification of Diseases, 9th Revision, Clinical Modification (ICD-9-CM). Diagnoses of co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders were also based on the ICD-9-CM.

What you need to know

The researchers examined healthcare claims data from 591 adult patients with pathological gambling. Over two-thirds of patients were male. Most patients had pathological gambling as their principal diagnosis. Slightly more women than men had a principal diagnosis of pathological gambling. More women than men had co-occurring mental health disorders, except for alcohol use disorders. Men were more likely than women to have an alcohol use disorder. Also, more women than men seeking treatment for pathological gambling had three or more co-occurring conditions. Women also had more episodes of care for those disorders than men. This study shows that gender-specific strategies are needed to address differences in mental health and substance use disorders and related healthcare needs.

The healthcare claims data also included patient age, gender, zip code, and dates and type of health care service provided, provider random identifiers and provider zip code. The researchers added up each patient's total number of mental health and substance use disorders. They grouped the number of diagnoses into three groups: 1-2 diagnoses, 3-4 diagnoses, and 5 or more diagnoses.

The researchers also used each patient's principal diagnosis to classify each episode of care into mental health or substance use disorder.

The researchers analyzed co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders for patients who had a principal diagnosis of pathological gambling by gender. The researchers also analyzed differences in

health care use for mental health and substance use disorders by gender.

What the researchers found

Among the 591 patients diagnosed with pathological gambling, over two-thirds (68.4%) were men. Women seeking care for pathological gambling and co-occurring disorders were older than men.

Slightly more women (83.4%) than men (80.2%) seeking treatment had pathological gambling as their principal diagnosis. Having pathological gambling as the principal or primary diagnosis was associated with a greater use of healthcare services.

More women than men had a co-occurring depressive or mood disorder. More men than women had a co-occurring alcohol use disorder. Also, more women than men had 3 or more co-occurring disorders; whereas, more men than women had 1-2 co-occurring disorders.

Women seeking treatment for pathological gambling and co-occurring disorders used more health care services than men. On average, women had more episodes of care related with mood disorders and neurotic disorders, including anxiety disorders, than men. There was no difference in the number of episodes of care for substance use between men and women.

Having a diagnosis of a mood or neurotic disorder (e.g., anxiety disorder) increased the use of health care for both genders. Having a diagnosis of a substance use disorder increased the use of health care in men compared to men without the diagnosis. This was not found in women.

How you can use this research

The findings suggest that different screening and treatment strategies to reduce prevalence of pathological gambling are needed for each gender. For instance, clinicians could screen for and treat alcohol use disorder among men with pathological gambling. For females with pathological gambling, clinicians could screen for mood and neurotic

disorders. Patients, especially females, might also present with multiple co-occurring disorders.

About the researchers

Evelyn Brand is affiliated with Mathematica Policy Research in Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA. **Rosa Rodriguez-Monguio** is affiliated with the School of Pharmacy and the Medication Outcomes Centre at the University of California San Francisco in San Francisco, California, USA. **Rachel Volberg** is affiliated with the School of Public Health and Health Sciences at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, Massachusetts, USA. For more information about this study, please contact **Rosa Rodriguez-Monguio** at Rosa Rodriguez-Monguio@ucsf.edu.

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