

research snapshot

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Problem gambling and gambling-related harms in sexual minority men

What this research is about

Problem gambling occurs when someone struggles to control their time and/or money spent gambling. This can cause financial, social, and psychological harms to the person who gambles and their social network. Men have been found to be at greater risk for problem gambling than women. However, not much attention has been paid to problem gambling among sexual minority men (SMM). Research suggests that SMM are more likely to engage in high-risk behaviours, such as drug use. Thus, SMM may be at greater risk of problem gambling than heterosexual men. SMM may experience greater risk due to the stress of being a minority (e.g., experiencing stigma). There is some preliminary research to indicate that SMM are more at-risk of problem gambling than heterosexual men, but more research is needed.

The aim of this study was to better understand how SMM gamble and whether there are unique risk and protective factors related to problem gambling in this population. The authors examined general gambling behaviours, such as participation, frequency, and money spent, as well as problem gambling risk. They also assessed which factors might protect SMM from developing problem gambling, and which factors might place them at greater risk.

What the researchers did

The researchers advertised their study through gender and sexual minority community/ social networks and organizations, as well as public common areas. People could complete the study online by following a link in the study advertisement. The study participants were 207 heterosexual men and 101 SMM aged 18 years and older.

What you need to know

Researchers have established that men are at higher risk of problem gambling. However, little is known about problem gambling in sexual minority men (SMM). The authors of this study surveyed 101 SMM and 207 heterosexual men. The aim of the study was to identify risk factors and protective factors of problem gambling in SMM compared to heterosexual men. The researchers found that SMM had fewer symptoms of problem gambling and experienced fewer gambling-related harms. They also gambled less frequently and spent less money gambling compared to heterosexual men. Erroneous gambling beliefs and impulsivity were risk factors for problem gambling and gambling harms for both SMM and heterosexual men, after taking into account other risk and protective factors.

The online survey had several questionnaires. Participants were asked questions about what types of gambling they had participated in over the past 12 months and how much money they had spent on each type. The Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI) was used to assess risk of problem gambling. The Short Gambling Harms Screen (SGHS) was used to assess harms from gambling. Other gambling questionnaires assessed erroneous gambling beliefs and expectancies of the outcomes from gambling (e.g., enjoyment and fun). The survey also asked about hazardous alcohol use, tendency to act impulsively when having negative emotion, psychological distress, perceived stigma, and experiences of discrimination. The survey assessed resilience, social support, and community connectedness as protective factors.

What the researchers found

The researchers found that heterosexual men had more symptoms of problem gambling compared to SMM. There was also a greater proportion of heterosexual men who engaged in gambling activities than SMM, specifically on casino games, horse racing, sports, and keno. Heterosexual men also gambled more frequently and spent more money per gambling session compared to SMM. However, both groups had a high number of people with moderate-risk or problem gambling. Almost two-thirds of SMM had moderate-risk or problem gambling. About 71% of SMM reported at least one gambling-related harm.

The researchers found that for heterosexual men only, hazardous alcohol use was related to more severe problem gambling. But it did not uniquely predict problem gambling when taking into account other factors. For both SMM and heterosexual men, having more erroneous gambling beliefs and being more impulsive predicted more severe problem gambling and greater gambling-related harms. Engaging in more gambling activities also predicted more severe problem gambling for both groups. Engaging in more gambling activities predicted greater gambling-related harms for the SMM as well.

The researchers did not find perceived stigma and discrimination to be unique risk factors for problem gambling and gambling-related harms for SMM. However, SMM who experienced more discrimination tended to gamble more problematically and experience more harms related to gambling. The researchers also looked at potential protective factors. SMM who felt more connected to the mainstream community tended to have less symptoms of problem gambling and experienced fewer gambling-related harms. Thus, community connectedness might be a protective factor for SMM. Emotional informational support and positive social interaction were two forms of social support that might also be protective for SMM.

How you can use this research

This study contributes to the research on problem gambling in sexual and gender minority men. The

researchers found that SMM did not have higher rates of gambling generally or problematically compared to heterosexual men, contrasting with previous research. This study could be useful to researchers and public health.

About the researchers

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