

research snapshot

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Teenagers taking medication for nervousness may be more likely to develop gambling problems

What this research is about

People who suffer from anxiety symptoms, such as nervousness, get stressed easily. Children and teenagers are often given medication to reduce their nervousness. National surveys have estimated that one in every 15 children who are 11 to 15 years old, take medication for nervousness. Children and teenagers taking this medication may become impulsive (that is, do things without thinking about the consequences), have difficulty thinking, and make riskier choices. These side effects may make children and teenagers participate in risky activities, such as gambling. On the other hand, teenagers may gamble to cope with their nervousness.

Teenagers who take medication for nervousness are more likely to participate in risky activities, like smoking and drinking, compared to teenagers who do not take this medication. In this study, the researchers explored whether teenagers who take medication for nervousness are also more likely to develop problem gambling. Problem gambling is repetitive gambling behaviour that leads to negative consequences.

What the researchers did

The researchers analyzed data from the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) Survey in Italy. The survey was distributed in 2013 and 2014. Survey participants were 20,791 high school students in Italy who were 15 years old.

Participants completed the South Oaks Gambling Screen – Revised for Adolescents (SOGS-RA). The SOGS-RA assessed participants for at-risk and problem gambling. Participants reported whether they had taken medication for nervousness in the past month. The survey also collected demographic information

What you need to know

In this study, the researchers explored whether teenagers who take medication for nervousness are at higher risk of problem gambling compared to teenagers who do not take the medication. The researchers analyzed data from the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children Survey in Italy, completed in 2013 and 2014. About 6% of teenagers reported taking medication for nervousness. The same proportion of teenagers were found to be at-risk or have problem gambling. Teenagers taking medication for nervousness were more likely to be at-risk of gambling problems or have problem gambling, compared to teenagers who were not taking the medication. More research is needed to identify how taking medication for nervousness influences gambling behaviour.

from participants, such as their gender and family characteristics. The survey included the HBSC Symptom Checklist to ask participants if they had any physical or psychological complaints in the last six months. Physical complaints included headache or stomachache. Psychological complaints included difficulty falling asleep, feeling low, and feeling irritable.

What the researchers found

More girls than boys reported physical and psychological complaints. About 1 in every 16 survey participants (6%) had problem gambling or were at risk of problem gambling. More boys than girls had problem gambling or were at risk of problem

gambling. The same proportion of participants (6%) took medication for nervousness.

Teenagers who were taking medication for nervousness were more likely to be at-risk of or have problem gambling, compared to teenagers who were not taking the medication. Physical and psychological complaints did not affect the relationship between taking medication for nervousness and problem gambling.

How you can use this research

Prevention service providers can use this research to understand that teenagers who use medication for treating nervousness, may be more likely to develop problem gambling. Prevention service providers could screen for risk behaviours among teenagers who use medication for nervousness, and vice versa.

Researchers can use this research to identify how taking medication for nervousness influences gambling behaviour. It is possible that the type of medication used for nervousness reduces teenagers' self-control. This change may lead teenagers to gamble too much. On the other hand, teenagers may take medication to deal with the nervousness they feel from gambling. More research is also needed to explore if medication for nervousness affects gambling behaviour in other age groups such as adults.

About the researchers

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Citation

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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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