

research snapshot

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Gender differences in gambling: analyses from a Brazilian study

What this research is about

Pathological and problem gambling (PG) are on the rise globally. Prevalence studies have noted differences among men and women, with men being more likely to gamble and have a gambling problem. In Brazil, there is still not enough research to determine if gender patterns exist. Previous research has noted risk factors that place men and women at a higher risk for having a gambling problem. For instance, for men, being separated, divorced or widowed, lacking social support, and resorting to negative coping strategies may lead to higher gambling. For women, being middle-aged, having low education and low-middle income, having never been married, having a stressful life, and using negative coping strategies may increase their chance of gambling more. Overall, it seems that gambling is related to social and demographic factors. Thus, this research aimed to compare gambling in men and women by exploring demographic and other behavioural factors.

What the researchers did

The researchers used data from the Brazilian National Alcohol Survey and Related Behaviors (BNAS). Overall, there were 3007 survey interviews. The researchers used the gambling section of the survey.

This survey had three main questions about gambling. It asked whether participants ever had to lie about how much money they bet, whether they felt the need to bet more money, and how much money they bet in one month. The first two questions were from the Lie/Bet Questionnaire (LBQ). Participants who answered yes to at least one question were considered at-risk gamblers.

What you need to know

This study examined the demographic and gambling related factors that were associated with gender differences in gambling. The researchers used a national Brazilian dataset. Results revealed that males were more likely to be exposed to gambling and to have problems from gambling than females. Males started gambling at an earlier age and had a quicker progression than females.

Gambling factors included the age of onset of regular gambling and the age when participants first experienced a gambling problem. These two factors were used to calculate their gambling progression. Participants were asked about their preferred gambling types. Finally, they completed the National Opinion Research Center DSM-IV Screen for Gambling Problems.

The main gambling factors included lifetime gambling exposure (i.e., whether they gambled at least once) and lifetime history of gambling problems (i.e., whether they had to lie to others about gambling or felt the need to gamble more). The researchers also included demographic factors (e.g., gender, age, ethnicity, education level, student status, marital status, employment status, income, socioeconomic status (SES), birthplace, residence, religious affiliation and its importance).

What the researchers found

The results revealed that 12.5% of the participants had a lifetime gambling exposure. Males were more likely to have gambled, with 88.3% of gamblers being men. With regards to lifetime history of gambling

problems, 4% of the participants reported having experienced a gambling problem. Of those, males were again in the majority, with 73.8%. Overall, results showed that males were 2.3 times more at risk of gambling exposure than females. They were also 3.6 times more likely to experience gambling-related problems than females.

The researchers examined the demographic factors that may increase one's exposure to gambling. They found that being older, having a minority ethnic background, being unemployed or retired, and living in a metropolitan area increased one's risk of gambling and having a gambling problem. Protestant religious affiliation seemed to protect against gambling. Religious affiliation, however, did not protect against the risk of developing a gambling problem once gambling had occurred.

Next, the researchers compared male and female at-risk gamblers. The findings revealed that males were more likely to never have been married or in a cohabitated relationship, and to have lower SES. Females were more likely to have lower income and less likely to be part of the economically active population. Moreover, males started to gamble at an earlier age (during their 20s), as opposed to females (around 30s). They were also quicker to develop gambling problems (gambling progression of 3 years), as opposed to females (about 12 years).

How you can use this research

This research could be used by service providers and clinicians. Treatment plans could be personalized for males and females according to their needs. Prevention and intervention programs could examine their motivations to gamble and their sociodemographic profiles. Cross-cultural research could explore profiles of men and women who gamble in different cultural settings.

About the researchers

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