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How gambling can harm different types of affected others: A Finnish population survey

What this research is about

Gambling related harms are the negative consequences of gambling. These can include reduced health, emotional harms, and financial harms among others. These harms can affect individuals, families, communities, and the population overall.

People who are close to someone with problem gambling are at high risk of experiencing gambling related harms, even if they do not gamble themselves. These people are often called 'affected others' since they are affected by someone else's gambling.

Affected others who are family members of the person who gambles can experience many types of harm. In addition, children with parents who gamble are more likely to engage in risky behaviours. Non-family members are less likely to experience harm from someone else's gambling. However, friends and co-workers can still experience harm.

It is estimated that 19% of people living in Finland are affected others. Therefore, it is important to understand the gambling related harms that affected others experience. This study looks at the different ways problem gambling can harm both family and non-family affected others.

What the researchers did

The researchers used data from the population-based Finnish Gambling Harms Survey. The Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare performed this survey on adults living in three regions (Uusimaa, Pirkanmaa, Kymenlaakso) in Finland in 2017. The survey was sent out online and through the postal service. Overall, 7186 people participated. Participants were 49 years old on average, and about half of them were men.

What you need to know

Gambling can cause harms for both the person who gambles as well as those close to them, often referred to as 'affected others'. Affected others can be family members or non-family members of the person who gambles. This study surveyed people in Finland to see how many were affected others, what their relationships were to the person who gambled, and what harms they experienced. About 13% of participants were affected others. Overall, the most common types of harm they experienced were emotional, relationship, and financial harms. Additionally, those who were family members tended to experience more harm than non-family members. However, the type and amount of harm affected others experienced differed based on their specific relationship with the person who gambled.

First, the survey tested if participants were affected others. It did this by asking if, in the past year, there was a person in their life that they thought gambled too much. If participants said 'yes', they were asked what that person's relationship was to them. There were five options for family relationships: partner, ex-partner, parent/stepparent, child/stepchild, and other family member. There were five options for non-family relationships: non-family member living in the same household, co-worker, friend, neighbour, and other.

Next, the survey asked participants which of the following gambling harms they experienced:

- Emotional (e.g., anxiety, hopelessness, depression, or worry about well-being of others).

- Relationship (e.g., having arguments, separating from a partner, or distancing from friends).
- Financial (e.g., payment issues, loans related to gambling, or threat of eviction).
- Social deviance (e.g., emotional or physical violence, being a victim of theft or identity theft).
- Health (e.g., sleep problems, or headaches).
- Work/study (e.g., reduced ability to work/study).

What the researchers found

Close to 13% of participants were affected others (i.e., they knew at least one person that they considered to have problem gambling). Almost 6% of participants were family members of the person who gambled (i.e., 'affected family members'). About 8% had non-family relationships with the person who gambled (i.e., 'affected non-family members'). Women were more likely to be affected family members, while men were more likely to be affected non-family members (most often friends or co-workers).

Overall, 42% of affected others experience gambling related harms. The most common types of harm were emotional, relationship, and financial harms. These were the most common for both family and non-family affected others. However, family members were more likely to experience harm overall, and were more likely to experience multiple types of harm. In contrast, non-family members were more likely to experience work- or study-related harms.

Participants who were young adults (18–34 years old) were more likely to experience financial harms. Participants who were women or were family members of the person who gambled were more likely to experience emotional harm. Emotional harm was especially common for those whose parent or child gambled. Finally, partners and ex-partners of people who gambled experienced relationship and financial harms frequently.

How you can use this research

This research shows that affected others can experience different types of harms based on the relationship they have with the person who gambles. Future work could look for the strategies that best help different types of affected others deal with the

harms they experience. This study could be useful for policy makers to be aware that gambling can harm a variety of both family and non-family affected others.

About the researchers

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Citation

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