

research snapshot

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Inability to stop gambling linked to suicidal thoughts in men who use drugs and alcohol

What this research is about

Evidence suggests that people who gamble are more likely to use drugs and alcohol than people in the general population. As well, people who use drugs and alcohol are more likely to have problem gambling. Problem gambling is repetitive gambling behaviour that leads to negative consequences.

Cognitive distortions about gambling may make gamblers more likely to use drugs and have suicidal thoughts. Cognitive distortions are incorrect thoughts and beliefs gamblers have about gambling. For example, some gamblers have a perceived inability to stop gambling. This means that they believe they cannot stop gambling, even if they want to.

In this study, the researchers explored whether using drugs and alcohol explains the relationship between cognitive distortions and suicidal thoughts. They also explored if gender (i.e., being a man or woman) affects this relationship.

What the researchers did

The researchers recruited participants from sports betting cafes in two cities in Nigeria. Participants were 251 adults who were between 18 and 39 years of age and regularly bet on sports. Most of the participants were male (82.1%) and unmarried (93.3%).

Participants completed a survey that contained three questionnaires. The Suicidal Ideation Attributes Scale determined whether participants had suicidal thoughts. The Psychoactive Substance Use Questionnaire determined if participants used alcohol and drugs. The Gambling-Related Cognition Scale determined if participants believed they were unable to stop gambling.

What you need to know

In this study, the researchers explored whether using drugs and alcohol explains the relationship between incorrect gambling beliefs and suicidal thoughts. They also explored if gender (i.e., being a man or woman) affects this relationship. The researchers recruited participants from sports betting cafes in two cities in Nigeria. Participants were 251 adults who regularly bet on sports. Participants completed a survey. Overall, men who believed that they could not stop gambling were at greater risk of having suicidal thoughts if they also used drugs and alcohol. This was not observed in women, likely because of their lower drug and alcohol use. These findings could be helpful to treatment services and suicidal prevention programmes.

What the researchers found

Overall, participants who believed they could not stop gambling were more likely to use drugs and alcohol. Participants who used more drugs and alcohol had more suicidal thoughts. However, cognitive distortions did not directly lead to suicidal thoughts. That is, participants with more incorrect beliefs about gambling were not at higher risk of having suicidal thoughts.

Male participants who believed they could not stop gambling were more likely to have suicidal thoughts if they used drugs or alcohol. This finding suggests that drug and alcohol use could provide an explanation for the relationship between perceived inability to stop gambling and suicidal thoughts, but only in men. The same results were not found in women.

Therefore, gender also affects the relationship between perceived inability to stop gambling and suicidal thoughts. There is no relationship between perceived inability to stop gambling and suicidal thoughts in women. This could be because women use drugs and alcohol less than men.

How you can use this research

Researchers can use this research to further investigate the relationship between cognitive distortions and suicidal thoughts among people with mild to severe gambling problems. Researchers could also include more women in their studies. More research is also needed to create a questionnaire that specifically identifies suicidal thoughts in gamblers.

This research can also be helpful for suicidal prevention and treatment service providers. For example, treatment service providers can help gamblers correct their cognitive distortions. This approach may reduce the likelihood that gamblers will use drugs and alcohol and have suicidal thoughts.

About the researchers

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Citation

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About Gambling Research Exchange (GREO)

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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