

research snapshot

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The effects of gambling problems on family and interpersonal adjustment over time

What this research is about

Gambling problems can lead to adverse consequences for individuals and their families. Some adverse consequences for families include losses of trust, family conflict, and violence. Most studies on familial effects of gambling problems have collected data at a single point in time. There remains a strong need for further research on how gambling problems affect family and interpersonal adjustment over time. It is possible that gambling problems could lead to losses of trust that negatively affect family functioning and social support in the long term. On the other hand, relationships may be resilient and able to recover from short-term crises. Thus, this study aimed to evaluate the influences of gambling problems on family and interpersonal adjustment. It examined whether gambling problems could predict changes in family and interpersonal adjustment over time.

What the researcher did

The researchers analyzed data from the Quinte Longitudinal Study (QLS). The QLS surveyed adults living in Belleville in southeast Ontario, Canada, from 2006 to 2010. In 2006, a total of 4121 individuals who completed the survey agreed to be followed up on an annual basis. They were then invited to complete an additional survey each year for the next four years. Most participants did the surveys online, with a few filling out paper surveys.

The surveys included the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI) to assess gambling problems in participants who had gambled on three or more days, or had won or lost more than \$10 in the past year. Based on their responses, participants were

What you need to know

This study examined the effects of gambling problems on family and interpersonal adjustment over time. Participants were 4121 Canadian adults, who were invited to complete a survey on a yearly basis from 2006 to 2010. Family adjustment was determined based on family functioning and relationship satisfaction. Interpersonal adjustment was based on social support from family and friends.

At baseline in 2006, participants with at-risk gambling (ARG) or moderate-risk/problem gambling (MR/PG) had lower family and interpersonal adjustment. But ARG or MR/PG at baseline did not predict change in family and interpersonal adjustment over time. Rather, MR/PG as assessed yearly predicted lower family and interpersonal adjustment for that year. In other words, participants who reported MR/PG for a specific year also had lower adjustment for that year. MR/PG had time-lagged effects on family functioning and social support. Thus, participants who reported MR/PG for a year could be expected to have lower family functioning and social support in subsequent years.

categorized as having no problems, at-risk gambling (ARG), or moderate-risk/problem gambling (MR/PG).

The surveys also asked participants about family functioning and social support. Those who were married or in a common-law relationship reported how satisfied they were with their relationship. Family functioning and relationship satisfaction were assessed to determine family adjustment. Social

support was used to determine interpersonal adjustment. There were also survey questions to determine if participants had other mental health issues, including depression, anxiety, and substance use problems.

What the researchers found

At baseline in 2006, participants with ARG or MR/PG had lower family and interpersonal adjustment. They reported lower family functioning, were less satisfied with their relationship, and had lower social support. But ARG or MR/PG at baseline did not predict change in family and interpersonal adjustment over time.

Rather, MR/PG as assessed yearly was associated with decreases in family and interpersonal adjustment for a specific year. In other words, participants who reported MR/PG for a specific year also had lower family and interpersonal adjustment for that year.

MR/PG had time-lagged effects on family functioning and social support. Thus, participants who reported MR/PG for a specific year could be expected to have lower family functioning and social support in subsequent years.

ARG as assessed yearly was associated with decreases in family functioning and social support for that year. But ARG did not have an effect on relationship satisfaction.

How you can use this research

This study could be useful to gambling treatment providers, clinicians, and researchers. The findings suggest that gambling problems can lead to short-term crises in family life. Thus, there is a need to assist families of problem gamblers during times of crisis. The findings also suggest a need for family-focused interventions to assist both gamblers and their family members. Clinicians may want to ask their patients about problems related to gambling in the family and refer them to appropriate services. Further research is still needed to understand the long-term impacts of gambling problems on family and interpersonal adjustment.

About the researchers

Sean Cowlshaw is affiliated with the School of Social and Community Medicine at the University of Bristol in Bristol, UK. He is also affiliated with the Centre for Gambling Research at The Australian National University in Canberra, Australia. **Aino Suomi** and **Bryan Rodgers** are affiliated with the Centre for Gambling Research at The Australian National University. For more information about this study, please contact Sean Cowlshaw at sean.cowlshaw@bristol.ac.uk.

Citation

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Keywords

Community sample, family functioning, gambling, Latent Trajectory Modelling (LTM), longitudinal, relationship satisfaction, social support

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