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The impacts of parental gambling frequency on adolescent gambling

What this research is about

Today, gambling is part of the life experiences of many adolescents. Gambling is discouraged for youth under 18 years old. However, research has found that 35.7% to 74.4% of adolescents across the world gamble. In addition, adolescents who experience gambling problems range from 0.2% to 12.3% across the world. Problem gambling has psychological and social consequences on youth.

Adolescent problem gambling is multidimensional. It can be understood by considering the relationship between individuals and their environment. Individual factors include low gambling-related knowledge and high expectations of economic gain. Other factors include superstitious thinking and gambling-related false beliefs. Environmental factors include availability of gambling activities and gambling among one's family or peer group. Parents' attitudes towards risky behaviours play a role in adolescents' engagement in such behaviours. The same can be said if parents engage in these risky behaviours. This study investigated the role of parental gambling behaviour on adolescent gambling.

What the researchers did

Participants were 680 parents (36% men) and 680 adolescents (51% boys). The adolescents were attending their second year at different high schools in Tuscany, Italy. About 17% reported having immigrant origins. Parents completed a paper survey at home. The adolescents administered the survey to their parents by reading the survey questions like in an interview. The survey was then returned in a sealed envelope to the school. The adolescents completed a survey in class during school time.

What you need to know

This study looked at individual and environmental factors influencing adolescent gambling. Individual factors included correct gambling knowledge, superstitious thinking, and gambling-related false beliefs. Environmental factors included parental gambling frequency. The researchers surveyed 680 parents of 680 high school students in Tuscany, Italy. They found that parental gambling frequency was directly linked with adolescents' gambling frequency. Lower correct gambling knowledge and superstitious thinking influenced gambling-related false beliefs, which led to higher gambling frequency and problem gambling among adolescents.

Parents were asked how often they participated in 10 gambling activities in the last 12 months. This provided a total score showing past-year gambling frequency. Participation in each of the 10 gambling activities was counted to create a gambling versatility score. Gambling versatility referred to the range of different gambling activities that the parents engaged in. Parents were also asked with whom they gamble and their age when they first gambled.

The adolescents filled out the Gambling Related Knowledge Scale for Adolescents (GRKS-A). It is a self-report measure to assess knowledge regarding the nature of gambling, functioning, and risks. The adolescents also filled out the Superstitious Thinking Scale. It is a self-report measure assessing superstitious beliefs. These are false beliefs when people perceive casual relations between unrelated events. In addition, the adolescents filled out the

Gambling Related Cognition Scale - Revised for Adolescents (GRCS-RA). It is a self-report scale that measures gambling-related false beliefs.

The adolescents filled out the Gambling Behaviour Scale for Adolescents (GBS-A). This scale evaluates gambling habits and gambling disorder symptoms in adolescents. They were also asked with whom they gamble and the age when they first gambled.

What the researchers found

The majority of parents (67%) reported having gambled at least once in the previous 12 months. Among those who gambled, 15% gambled regularly (at least one gambling activity on a weekly or daily basis). On average, parents engaged in one gambling activity. Parents reported mostly gambling alone and with family members. They reported having their first gambling experience at about 22 years.

The majority of adolescents (72%) reported having gambled at least once in the past 12 months. Among those who gambled, almost half (48%) gambled regularly. On average, adolescents engaged in two gambling activities. They reported gambling mainly with family members and friends. They gambled for the first time at about 12 years old. About 85% of the adolescents were placed in the "non-disordered gambling" category. About 11% were classified as "at-risk" and 4% as experiencing "disordered gambling".

The gambling frequency of adolescents was lower when they had more correct gambling knowledge. The gambling frequency of adolescents was higher when they had more superstitious thinking and gambling-related false beliefs. Their gambling frequency was also higher when their parents' gambling frequency was higher. Adolescents who gambled more frequently and had more gambling-related false beliefs were more likely to experience gambling problems.

Parents' gambling frequency had a significant impact on adolescents' gambling frequency. Adolescents gambled more frequently if their parents gambled more frequently. Also, adolescents with more correct gambling knowledge had fewer false beliefs about gambling. As a result, they gambled less frequently

and were less likely to experience problem gambling. The opposite was found for superstitious thinking, which was associated with having more gambling-related false beliefs.

How you can use this research

This research can be used to inform prevention programs to reduce adolescent gambling.

About the researchers

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