

research snapshot

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Factors associated with problem gambling and family violence

What this research is about

People with gambling problems can experience many negative consequences. One consequence is intimate partner violence (IPV). Research has shown that problem gambling may disrupt relationships and negatively impact one's family. There is also evidence that suggests a relationship between problem gambling and victimization and perpetration of family violence. Family violence can occur to partners and other family members.

There is a limited understanding of the path from gambling to IPV or family violence. Some research suggests that people, particularly women, who are victims of violence may gamble to cope with negative experiences. Other studies suggest that gambling increases chronic familial stress. This can lead the gambler to act violently towards a family member, and vice versa. Several factors increase the risk for problem gambling and family violence. These include alcohol and drug use, mental health issues, and impulsivity (i.e., a tendency to act rashly without thinking about the consequences).

This study aimed to expand past research by investigating the factors associated with family violence in people with gambling problems. It also examined if these factors might influence the relationship between problem gambling and family violence.

What the researchers did

The researchers recruited 141 adults who were seeking treatment at a problem gambling service in Australia. To assess family violence, the researchers used the Hurt–Insult–Threaten–Scream (HITS) Scale. This scale was modified to measure family violence

What you need to know

This study examined the factors associated with family violence and problem gambling. The researchers recruited 141 adults who were seeking treatment for gambling. Results revealed that family violence was prevalent. About 18.4% reported being a victim of family violence. In addition, 19.1% admitted to acting violently towards their family members. Participants who experienced greater distress, PTSD symptoms and legal problems due to their gambling were more likely to be a victim of family violence. Participants who reported low coping motives and higher alcohol use were more likely to be victimized if they had severe gambling problems. Finally, having more severe gambling problems, more legal consequences, and being more impulsive predicted violence towards others.

victimization (e.g., someone hurt or insulted them) and perpetration (e.g., they hurt or insulted someone). Participants also specified whether the violence involved immediate or extended family member(s). The researchers used the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI) to assess severity of gambling in the past 12 months. They also asked the participants how much time they spent gambling, how often they gambled, and how much money they spent in a typical two-week period. The Kessler–6 (K6) was used to measure how often the participants experienced distress, such as nervousness, agitation, fatigue, and depression.

To measure symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), the researchers used the Primary

Care–Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PC-PTSD). The Coping Motives subscale of the Gambling Motivation Questionnaire (GMQ) was used to assess whether participants gambled to avoid or reduce negative emotions. To measure alcohol and drug use, the researchers asked the participants to describe their alcohol and drug use in the past two weeks. The options included none, occasional, moderate, heavy, and excessive. To assess gambling related legal consequences, the participants were asked if they had any court or legal matters. The Work and Social Adjustment Scale (WSAS) was used to assess adjustment in a number of domains (work, home leisure, etc.). Finally, the Motor Impulsivity subscale of the Barratt Impulsiveness Scale Short Form (BIS-15) was used to assess impulsivity.

What the researchers found

Results revealed that family violence was quite high. About 18.4% of the participants reported being a victim of family violence. About 19.1% admitted to acts of violence against their family members. Intimate partners and parents were most likely to be the victim of violence, or to act violently against the gambler. Participants with greater distress, PTSD symptoms, and legal problems due to their gambling were more likely to be victimized. Gambling motives and alcohol use influenced the relationship between problem gambling and victimization. Individuals with more severe gambling problems had a greater chance of being a victim of family violence victimization if they drank moderate to high levels of alcohol and if they did not regularly gamble to reduce or escape negative emotions. Finally, having more severe gambling problems, more legal problems, and being more impulsive predicted acting violently towards others.

How you can use this research

This research could be used by program and service providers. It suggests a need to routinely screen for family violence in addition to gambling. This research could also be used to develop new prevention and intervention programs. Service providers could address the roots of family violence and offer strategies to minimize family conflict. Future research

should examine the relationship between family violence and problem gambling longitudinally.

About the researchers

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