

research snapshot

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How does gambling behaviour affect work and nonwork roles?

What this research is about

Work-family interference has become a recent topic of interest for many researchers. The idea that ‘family life’ and ‘work life’ can conflict with one another is no longer a niche topic. There has been some criticism around the way work-family interference is defined. Traditionally, it is seen from a Western perspective, as a woman’s issue, and as being most relevant to professional employees. Researchers believe that only focusing on how work interferes with family life can lead to dismissal of other needs and identities. Scholars have raised the issue that other nonwork areas (e.g., health, education, community involvement, leisure) also cause different types of interference. These all could add unique challenges to an employee’s life.

The current study builds on and extends existing research. The basis behind this study was to test a process-oriented framework. It examined pathological gambling behaviour as a source of interference with work and nonwork areas. The researchers explored the effects of gambling interference, over and above any effects of work-nonwork interference. This way, the unique effects of gambling interference were isolated. Lastly, the researchers investigated whether cognitive withdrawal from work and nonwork roles could partly explain the negative effects of gambling interference on role performance.

What the researchers did

Participants were recruited from Amazon’s Mechanical Turk (MTurk), a crowdsourcing website. They completed a screening questionnaire that asked about gambling frequency, employment status, age, and hours worked. Only those individuals that lived in

What you need to know

‘Work life’ and ‘family life’ can conflict with each other in many ways. Recently, more scholars are looking at understanding how other nonwork areas (e.g., leisure, health, education) cause different types of interference in work and family life. This study tested a process-oriented framework to explore gambling interference in work and nonwork domains. The researchers also assessed whether cognitive withdrawal from work and nonwork roles linked gambling interference to reduced role performance.

Participants (259) were recruited from Amazon’s Mechanical Turk (MTurk). To meet inclusion criteria, they had to be living in the United States, be 18 years of age or older, gambled at least weekly, and worked 20 or more hours per week.

Findings suggest that gambling behaviour creates strain and interferes with both work and nonwork roles. This in turn reduces job performance and negatively impacts nonwork areas. Cognitive withdrawal from one’s role partly explains the negative effects of gambling on role performance in work and nonwork areas.

the United States, were 18 years of age or older, gambled at least weekly, and worked 20 or more hours per week were directed to complete the full survey. A total of 259 participants met the screening criteria and participated in the study.

Gambling behaviour was measured with the South Oaks Gambling Screen (SOGS), which evaluated pathological gambling behaviours. Based on the SOGS,

two in five participants met the cutoff for probable pathological gambling. Gambling interference and work/nonwork conflict were measured using the Strain-Based Work-Family Conflict Scale. Cognitive work and nonwork engagement were measured using a subscale of Rich, Lepine, and Crawford's measure of job engagement. Lastly, work and nonwork role performance were measured using Frone, Russell, and Cooper's five-item scale.

What the researchers found

The findings suggest that gambling behaviour interferes with both work and nonwork roles. This is in line with previous research that reveals strain-based work-family conflict is strongly linked to one another; work can create strain and interfere with nonwork areas, and vice versa. Even in a sample of participants not seeking treatment for gambling problems, gambling could interfere with and disrupt work and nonwork domains.

This disruption could lead to reduced role performance in both work and nonwork areas. This finding is supported by previous research that the strain an individual may feel due to excessive gambling can lead to multiple work-related issues. Some of these issues include lateness, absenteeism, performance reductions, and even job loss. Focusing on family life, past research has found through spousal reports that people with gambling problems find it difficult to meet role obligations in the family.

Reduced cognitive engagement was found to play a part in explaining how gambling interference might affect role performance. Cognitive engagement represents the amount of concentration and attention someone puts into a task. If that engagement is low due to gambling interference in work and nonwork life, role performance will also be reduced.

How you can use this research

Gambling is an activity that crosses work and nonwork life domains. The findings of this study suggest that organizations need to support employees who are seeking help for their gambling behaviour. This study can also inform future research. It may be beneficial to also look at behaviour and time-based interference.

Behaviour-based interference happens when a behaviour (gambling) is at odds with what is expected from another role (e.g., as an employee or a parent). Time-based interference could be measured by looking at how the amount of time spent gambling becomes excessive at the expense of other activities. These factors can be explored further to understand additional ways that gambling impacts life roles.

About the researchers

Lillian T. Eby, Melissa Robertson, Rachel Williamson, and Cynthia K. Maupin are affiliated with the Department of Psychology at the University of Georgia in Athens, Georgia, USA. For more information about this study, please contact Lillian T. Eby at leby@uga.edu.

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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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