

knowledge snapshot



The relationship between problem gambling and self-harm

What this article is about

Self-harm refers to a range of behaviours where someone hurts themselves. Self-harm includes behaviours where the person does not intend to die from their actions, called non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI). Self-harm also includes thinking about suicide (suicide ideation), attempting suicide, planning suicide, and dying by suicide.

Research has demonstrated that self-harm is related to problem gambling. Problem gambling could cause self-harm because of the negative consequences associated with it. A person with problem gambling may self-harm as a signal that they need help. They could also self-harm because their problem gambling has damaged interpersonal relationships.

It is difficult to ascertain the precise relationship between self-harm and problem gambling. One reason for this is that people with problem gambling also struggle with other mental health concerns. Self-harm is associated with many other mental health disorders, so it could be a result of those mental health concerns and not problem gambling. Self-harm also typically develops earlier in life than problem gambling does. This raises the possibility that self-harm is a risk factor for developing problem gambling.

The aim of this review article was to examine the effect of problem gambling on NSSI, suicide ideation, and suicide attempts.

What was done?

The authors created a search strategy to find research articles on problem gambling and self-harm. They applied this search to various databases such as Medline and PsycINFO. The authors looked at the articles identified by the search to see whether they

Why is this article important?

There is a relationship between problem gambling and self-harm. The negative consequences associated with problem gambling may cause someone to engage in behaviours related to self-harm. However, it is also possible that self-harm is a result of poor mental health that may precede problem gambling. The aim of this study was to identify research studies that had examined the relationship between self-harm and problem gambling. The authors identified 21 articles. The authors conducted two meta-analyses on the effect of problem gambling on suicide ideation and suicide attempts. The results indicated that people with problem gambling are more likely to have suicide ideation and to attempt suicide.

fit the criteria for inclusion. To be included in the review, articles needed to measure problem gambling using a valid measure. Articles had to also measure self-harm, and needed to look at the effect of problem gambling on self-harm or vice versa while controlling for at least one variable.

The authors found 21 studies that met their inclusion criteria. All studies were reviewed, and relevant information was coded, such as participant characteristics and the measures used to assess problem gambling and self-harm. Then, the authors conducted their meta-analyses. A meta-analysis allows researchers to combine the results of different studies on the same topic in a statistical analysis. This means that the researchers can use data from several studies to answer a research question more definitively. The researchers planned for meta-analyses to look at the effect of problem gambling as

a binary measure (yes/no) and as a continuous measure on self-harm. The latter included NSSI, suicide ideation, and suicide attempts.

What you need to know

Approximately 81% of studies measured the effect of problem gambling on self-harm. The remaining studies looked at the effect of self-harm on problem gambling. Fifty-seven percent of studies looked at self-harm over the lifetime. Sixty-two percent of studies looked at problem gambling over the lifetime. All studies' analysis of interest was cross-sectional.

The authors conducted five meta-analyses. However, three of these meta-analyses only included 2 or 3 studies. These studies did not have enough participants for the authors to be confident that an effect of problem gambling on self-harm (or vice versa) could be detected. As a result, they were treated as exploratory.

The first meta-analysis included ten studies. This meta-analysis looked at whether having gambling problems (yes or no) had an effect on suicide ideation. The results indicated that people with problem gambling were more likely to experience suicide ideation than people without problem gambling.

The second meta-analysis included ten studies. This meta-analysis examined whether having gambling problems (yes or no) had an effect on suicide attempts. The results indicated that people with problem gambling were more likely to attempt suicide.

Both meta-analyses were affected by publication bias. Studies contributing larger effects to the meta-analyses tended to be less precise. This is the result of academic journals prioritizing poorly designed studies with positive results over poorly designed studies with null results. When publication bias was taken into account, effects of problem gambling on self-harm became weaker.

Who is it intended for?

This article is intended for researchers and clinicians. The authors suggest that future studies use a longitudinal approach. This will help to better understand how problem gambling and self-harm

affect each other. Clinicians can use the results of this study to inform their practice in treating people with problem gambling. They should screen for self-harm when working with patients experiencing gambling problems. The results of this review show that suicide ideation and attempts are greater in people with problem gambling.

About the researchers

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