

research snapshot

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Is there a link between gambling, health, and medicine use?

What this research is about

Past research has found that individuals with gambling problems often have physical and mental health problems. In addition, problem gamblers often struggle with social and financial troubles. So, it is likely that problem gamblers may experience a poorer quality of life and higher stress than non-gamblers or non-problem gamblers.

People with high stress, poor moods and anxiety may use over-the-counter (OTC) analgesics to treat these symptoms. OTC analgesics are normally used to treat pain and fever. The use of OTC analgesics might be an unknown problem area among gamblers.

The current study examined the links between problem gambling and:

- 1) Health-related quality of life and perceived stress;
- 2) Pain or discomfort; and
- 3) The use of medication (e.g., prescribed and OTC analgesics and sleeping pills).

The current study examined these relationships among problem gamblers in the general population.

What the researchers did

The researchers used data from the Danish Health and Morbidity Survey 2010. This survey captured information from 15,165 adults living in Denmark.

The survey included the Lie/Bet Questionnaire, which was used to identify current problem gamblers, past problem gamblers, and non-problem gamblers. The survey also included the Short-Form-12, which assessed overall self-rated health, and physical and

What you need to know

The results of the current study suggest that both current and past problem gambling are strongly linked with poorer mental health and some physical health problems (e.g., headaches). In this study, both current and past problem gamblers were more likely to have high perceived stress than non-problem gamblers. Both current and past problem gamblers were also more likely to report pain and discomforts, including fatigue and sleeping problems, than non-problem gamblers. Past problem gamblers were more likely to have used prescribed sleeping pills than non-problem gamblers. There was no clear association between problem gambling and the use of prescribed or over-the-counter analgesics. Clinicians should be aware of these complicating factors when planning the treatment of problem gamblers.

mental health-related quality of life. The survey also measured participants' perceived stress.

Additionally, the survey included a checklist of symptoms, pain or complaints during the past two weeks. The checklist included eight types of pain or discomforts: pain or discomfort in the shoulder or neck; pain or discomfort in the back or lower back; pain or discomfort in the arms, hands, legs, knees, hips or joints; fatigue; headache; sleeping problems; depression or unhappiness; and anxiety. The survey also included a checklist of prescribed and OTC medicine use in the past two weeks, including: analgesics, sleeping pills, and sedatives.

What the researchers found

Current problem gamblers were three times more likely to rate their health as fair or poor compared to non-problem gamblers. Past problem gamblers were around two times more likely to rate their health as fair or poor compared to non-problem gamblers. Current and past problem gamblers were also more likely to report poorer mental health-related quality of life than non-problem gamblers. Current problem gamblers were around three times more likely to have high perceived stress than non-problem gamblers. Past problem gamblers were around two times more likely to have high perceived stress than non-problem gamblers.

Compared to non-problem gamblers, current and past problem gamblers were more likely to report most of the symptoms and discomforts during the past two weeks. For instance, current problem gamblers were two-and-a-half times more likely to have been very bothered by a headache than non-problem gamblers. The same pattern was found among past problem gamblers. Almost one-third (27.5%) of current problem gamblers and about 22.8% of past problem gamblers reported being very bothered by fatigue within the past two weeks. In contrast, only 12.4% of non-problem gamblers reported such a problem.

There was no link between problem gambling and the use of prescribed or OTC analgesics within the past two weeks. Past problem gamblers were more likely to have used prescribed sleeping pills than non-problem gamblers.

How you can use this research

This study shows that clinicians and treatment providers could be aware that problem gambling may come with mental and physical health problems, stress, fatigue, and sleeping problems. Clinicians and treatment providers could screen problem gamblers for these conditions when planning treatment. Also, they could promote mental wellness among problem gamblers in addition to treating gambling-related symptoms. Clinicians could also watch for signs of sleeping pill abuse in current and past problem gamblers.

About the researchers

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Keywords

Gambling, health surveys, population study, cross-sectional studies, health, pain, sleep, fatigue, analgesics

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