

# research snapshot

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## Social support from peers protects against the effects of relative deprivation on gambling disorder

### What this research is about

Youths are particularly at risk of experiencing problems with gambling. Studies suggest that 4-8% of youths have serious problems with gambling. Furthermore, another 10-15% are at risk for developing gambling problems.

Studies looking at risk factors of disordered gambling among youth have focused mostly on individual factors. These factors include age, gender, personality, family, and immigration. Yet, studies with adults suggest that socioeconomic factors are also important risk factors.

One such risk factor is relative deprivation. Relative deprivation is feeling less well off in terms of income or wealth, compared to specific groups of people, such as your neighbours. People who feel that they are less well off compared to others may gamble to improve their situation in the social hierarchy. Relative deprivation is different from absolute wealth, which reflects the actual amount of wealth one has. Of course, absolute wealth can also increase the risk of disordered gambling as it provides more access to gambling activities.

In this study, researchers examined the effects of relative deprivation and absolute wealth on disordered gambling. They also examined if social support might protect against the effect of relative deprivation on disordered gambling.

### What the researchers did

Data were drawn from the 2013-2014 Italian Health Behavior in School-aged Children (HBSC) study. This survey was a representative sample of Italian students who were 11, 13, and 15+ years of age. Only students

### What you need to know

Youths are vulnerable to developing disordered gambling. Studies looking at risk factors among youth have rarely examined socioeconomic risk factors. In a representative sample of 19,321 grade 10 students in Italy, the researchers found that family wealth and relative deprivation were associated with more problem gambling symptoms. In other words, having the financial means to gamble and feeling less well off than one's classmates, could lead to more gambling symptoms. Males, older age, and being a first-generation immigrant were associated with greater gambling problems. Lower social support was also associated with greater gambling problems. Peer social support was a protective factor in reducing the harms of relative deprivation on symptoms of disordered gambling. These findings suggest the importance of developing public health efforts to protect vulnerable youths from disordered gambling.

who were the age of 15+ (grade 10) were asked about gambling. The 12-item South Oaks Gambling Screen-Revised for Adolescents was used to assess disordered gambling. Family wealth was assessed using the HBSC Family Affluence Scale. Social support was measured using the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support. This scale measures social support from peers and family. The Teacher and Classmate Support Scale was used to assess support from teachers and classmates.

Relative deprivation was calculated using the Yitzhaki index. Classmates were used as the social reference

group. The Yitzhaki index was calculated by comparing each student's score on the Family Affluence Scale to scores from classmates who were better off.

### What the researchers found

A total of 19,321 grade 10 students were included in the study. There was a strong association between family wealth and relative deprivation. That is, students who reported greater family wealth were less likely to report feeling less well off compared to their classmates. Family wealth and relative deprivation were both associated with more gambling symptoms. Thus, having the financial means to gamble and feeling less well off than one's classmates were associated with more gambling symptoms. Males, older age, and first-generation immigrants reported higher gambling symptoms.

Peer social support was a protective factor in reducing the harms of relative deprivation on symptoms of disordered gambling. Feeling less well off compared to one's classmates was associated with more gambling problems for students who had low peer support. This was not observed as much among students who reported greater peer support. Support from family, classmates, and teachers was associated with fewer symptoms of disordered gambling, regardless of relative deprivation.

### How you can use this research

Educators and health providers could use this research to raise awareness that many youths have gambling problems. Public health efforts could also reduce the risk of disordered gambling among youths who are especially vulnerable because of individual or contextual factors. This at-risk group includes males, older youths, and first-generation immigrants.

### About the researchers

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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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