

research snapshot

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The experience of family members banning their problem gambling relatives from casinos

What this research is about

Problem gambling can result in serious harms to gamblers and their family members. Exclusions aim to minimize gambling-related harms by banning people with problem gambling behaviours from entering casinos. Most countries have self-exclusions, where gamblers can ban themselves. In Singapore, family members can apply for family exclusion orders (FEOs) to ban their spouses, parents, siblings or children from entering casinos. They can apply for FEOs if they have experienced harms caused by a family member's gambling. These harms may include loss of savings, debts, family violence, and suicide attempts. There is limited research examining FEOs. The current study explored the experience of family members who had successfully applied for an FEO, including reasons for the application and if they thought the FEO had been effective in minimizing gambling-related harms.

What the researcher did

Participants were 105 applicants of FEOs in Singapore. They were spouses, parents, siblings, or children of problem gamblers. Trained interviewers followed an interview guide to ask them about their experience applying for the FEO. The interview covered reasons for the application and impact of the FEO on family dynamics and functioning, well-being, and financial and debt conditions. Participants also rated how effective they thought the FEO had been in helping them manage their family member's problem gambling. The researchers examined participants'

What you need to know

The current study highlighted the experience of family members of problem gamblers, who had applied for family exclusion orders (FEOs). In Singapore, family members can apply for FEOs to ban their spouses, parents, siblings, or children from entering casinos. Participants reported both financial and non-financial harms as motivation for applying an FEO. Husbands, siblings, and children of problem gamblers felt that the FEO was effective in minimizing gambling-related harms. Most mothers and wives of problem gamblers did not feel that the FEO had much impact on their sons and husbands. Participants who rated the FEO as effective described a sense of relief after the FEO was in place. They also mentioned improved family finances and relationships. Most participants, however, did not expect the problem gamblers to abstain from all forms of gambling.

responses by their relationship to the problem gambler (i.e., if they were parents, spouses, siblings, or children).

What the researcher found

Participants reported both financial and non-financial harms as reasons for applying an FEO. Financial harms included: (1) loss of income and paying off large gambling debts when a parent, especially father, was the problem gambler; (2) paying off debts when a sibling was the problem gambler; and (3) elderly parents using their life savings to pay off

their children's gambling debts. The two groups of participants who were most negatively affected by financial harms were mothers and sisters of problem gamblers. Most mothers had low income and were in low-skilled jobs. Many reported having to pay off the gambling debts of their sons. Sisters helped problem gamblers the most in managing their gambling debts, such as through negotiation with banks and money lenders.

Non-financial harms included: (1) domestic violence, including verbal and physical abuse; (2) constant betrayal of trust by the problem gamblers, which resulted in high stress and increased family conflicts; (3) child neglect, especially when mothers were the problem gamblers; and (4) harm caused to physical and mental health of elderly parents when an adult child was the problem gambler.

Most participants (87.2%) rated the FEO as being effective. Four common reasons cited by the participants were: (1) feeling a sense of relief as it was stressful to constantly monitor if the problem gambler was visiting casinos; (2) positive actions demonstrated by problem gamblers after the FEO was in place, such as reducing time spent on other forms of gambling outside of casinos. Most participants, however, did not expect the problem gamblers to abstain from gambling entirely; (3) improved family relationships; and (4) improved family finances.

The three main groups who found the FEO effective were: (1) husbands of problem gambling wives; (2) children of problem gambling parents; and (3) siblings (mainly sisters) of problem gamblers. Mothers and wives of problem gamblers did not experience their sons and husbands change as positively after the FEO.

How you can use this research

This study shows that supports should be provided for family members of problem gamblers. For example, child care support should be made available, especially when the problem gambler is

the mother. Also, mental health support is needed for elderly parents with problem gambling children. Future research should explore the perspectives of problem gamblers in regards to the impact of FEOs.

About the Researcher

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Keywords

Family dynamics, casino gambling, family exclusion order, harm reduction, gender and impact of problem gambling

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