knowledge snapshot

A systematic review of prevention programs for young adults

What this article is about

Today, gambling has become a popular social activity. For some, it is their chosen form of recreation, but for others, it can become a problem. The prevalence of problematic or pathological gambling among young adults is high. Therefore, many studies have started to explore which preventative measures work best for this age group. Some educational and preventive efforts have proven effective in increasing knowledge and reducing false beliefs about gambling. However, such programs often run for school-aged children and adolescents. For instance, studies have found that if school-aged children are taught about the risks of gambling and probabilities, these may become protective factors against problem gambling. Unfortunately, much remains unknown about preventive programs among young adults. Hence, this review aimed to critically assess the existing literature on the effectiveness of prevention programs for young adults. The authors also aimed to identify specific program components that are used to decrease problem gambling.

What was done?

The authors did a systematic review using the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines. They did a comprehensive search for relevant studies in June 2018. They searched six electronic databases using a combination of specific key terms, and selected papers that were published in the last 20 years. The authors also reviewed ongoing and unpublished studies. Studies were included if they described prevention programs for young adults, aged 18 to 35 years old. Studies must include primary data, and could be written in English, Spanish, or French.

Why is this article important?

Young adults may be a vulnerable group for developing problem gambling. However, it is still unknown what prevention programs work for them because much of the research has focused on children and adolescents. This systematic review provides a summary of existing literature on prevention programs for young adults in the last 20 years. Only nine studies were found to be relevant and included in the review. All studies targeted university or college students. Most studies used a Personalized Normative Feedback approach, which produced good results in reducing problem gambling behaviours.

Upon review of title and abstract, the authors deemed 18 studies as relevant. They further reviewed the content with the exclusion and inclusion criteria and were left with 8 studies. The authors located one additional relevant study using the snowball method (i.e., searching the references of included studies). At the end, there were nine studies included in the systematic review.

What you need to know

All nine articles included undergraduate or college students. The average age ranged from 19 to 23 years old. All studies were done in the United States, except for one Canadian study. Most studies included a randomized controlled trial. Most interventions had a single session, with two having 4-6 group sessions. Duration ranged from 10 to 60-90 minutes per session. Four studies reported short-term post-tests at either 1-week or 1-month. Six studies reported

longer-term post-tests at 3- to 9- months. Three studies did not report any post-tests.

Four studies used the South Oaks Gambling Screen (SOGS) questionnaire. Two studies used the National Opinion Research Center DSM-IV Screen for Gambling Problems (NODS). Four studies used the Gambling Problem Index (GPI). Additional assessment tools included the Gambling Severity Index (GSI), the Canadian Problem Gambling Index (CPGI), and the Addiction Severity Index-Gambling section (ASI-G).

Most studies used the Personalized Normative Feedback (PNF) approach, also referred to as Personalized Feedback Intervention (PFI). This is when the intervention aims to correct mistaken thoughts about "typical" behaviours. For instance, if college students know that they overestimate others' gambling behaviours, they can compare their behaviour to that of the "norm" and make changes. Two studies used the Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) approach. CBT aims to correct false beliefs and illusions of control. It also includes coping with triggers and learning to prevent relapse. One study combined CBT with Motivational Enhancement Therapy (MET). It included personalized feedback about one's gambling behaviour and resolving any ambivalent feelings about gambling. Overall, results indicated that the seven studies that used the PNF were effective in reducing problem gambling behaviours. Using CBT alone or in combination with MET also showed positive results.

Who is it intended for?

This review is intended for intervention and prevention service providers. They could develop more prevention programs that specifically target young adults. It could also be useful to researchers. This review could promote other studies to use different strategies and methodologies to study what works for young adults. For instance, future studies could examine the effectiveness of pop-up messages for this age group.

About the researchers

Aris Grande-Gosende, Gloria García-Fernández, and **José Ramón Fernández-Hermida** are affiliated with the Department of Psychology at the University of Oviedo in Asturias, Spain. **Carla López-Núñez** is affiliated with the Department of Psychology at the Universidad Loyola Andalucía (España) in Andalucía, Spain. **Jeffrey Derevensky** is affiliated with the International Centre for Youth Gambling Problems and High-Risk Behaviors at McGill University in Montreal, QC, Canada. For more information about this study, please contact Aris Grande-Gosende at agrandegosende@gmail.com

Citation

Study funding

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 responsible 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.

Learn more about GREO by visiting greo.ca or emailing info@greo.ca.