



Report Summary

Loneliness is associated with problem gambling and suicidality

What this report is about

Problem gambling is a serious public health concern. Thus, it is important to identify factors associated with gambling-related harms. A previous report using the UK 2007 Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey found that problem gambling was associated with greater suicidality. Suicidality included such things as self-harm, thoughts about suicide, and suicide attempts. This report is part two of a three-report series on gambling and suicide in England. It explored if loneliness and other factors affect the relationship between problem gambling and suicidality.

What was done?

The researchers did a secondary analysis of the UK 2007 Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey. This survey consisted of a representative sample of the English population who were 16+ and living in private homes.

The survey collected the following information from participants:

- If participants ever had suicidal thoughts, suicidal attempts, and self-harm, and if this last occurred in the last week, last year, or longer.
- If participants had spent money on various gambling activities in the last year—those who answered ‘yes’ completed a problem gambling screen based on the DSM-IV criteria.
- If participants felt lonely or isolated from others in the last two weeks. This question was taken from the Social Functioning Questionnaire (SFQ).
- The level of social support participants received from family and friends, and the number of people they felt close to.

Why is this report important?

A secondary analysis of a large representative survey of UK adults found that loneliness was associated with suicidality. This relationship existed when other important factors were taken into account. These factors included age, gender, substance use, social support, and mental health concerns. Problem gambling was associated with suicide attempts independent of loneliness. Women were also more likely to report lifetime suicide attempts than men. Helping people with problem gambling increase their social supports and address feelings of loneliness may help reduce the risk of suicide attempts. People who are in regular contact with individuals who gamble problematically should be aware of the risk of loneliness and suicide in this population.

- Sense of belonging to the community, including trust in people living there.
- Physical and mental health, alcohol misuse, substance misuse, and smoking.
- Demographic information such as sex, age, marital status, etc.

Household information such as household size, number of children under the age of 15, living arrangements, etc.

The researchers examined the relationship between suicidality, problem gambling, and loneliness. They also looked at other important factors such as age, gender, substance use, mental health, and social supports.

What you need to know

A total of 6,941 people completed the survey. There were 41 (0.7%) people who met the criteria for problem gambling, and 172 (2.5%) were at-risk gamblers. People with problem gambling were more likely to feel lonely compared to non-gamblers and at-risk gamblers. They also had smaller social networks and were less likely to have a partner or children. In addition, people with problem gambling were less likely to think that family and friends gave them support or feel a sense of belonging to the community around them.

People with problem gambling reported higher rates of lifetime suicidality. Women were more likely to report lifetime suicide attempts than men. Loneliness and problem gambling were associated with lifetime suicidality. Physical health, smoking, alcohol misuse, substance misuse, and mental health were also associated with lifetime suicidality. Loneliness was still associated with suicidality when these other important factors were taken into consideration. The authors concluded that helping people with problem gambling develop social supports and reduce their feelings of loneliness could reduce the risk of suicide.

Who is it intended for?

This report is intended for people who are in regular contact with individuals with problem gambling. They can include health care professionals, staff at gambling venues, and or people in the community.

What does the report recommend?

This report recommends that people who are in contact with individuals with problem gambling be aware of the increased risk of loneliness and suicide in this population. The report also recommends training staff in gambling venues on suicide awareness. Health care professionals in mental health and substance use settings should also screen for gambling problems.

About the researchers

Ann John and Simon Dymond are affiliated with the Department of Psychology and Behaviour Analysis at Swansea University in Wales, UK. Sze Chim Lee is a

researcher and data scientist at Swansea University Medical School in the Population Psychiatry, Suicide and Informatics Lab. Heather Wardle is affiliated with the Department of Public Health, Environments and Society at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine in England. Sally McManus is an independent researcher and is also affiliated with the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) in London, England, where she led the Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey programme. Questions about this report can be sent to info@gambleaware.org.

Citation

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Study disclosures

The research question for this report was agreed upon by GambleAware and the Advisory Board for Safer Gambling (ABSG), who are independent advisors of the Gambling Commission. The research questions for Reports 1 and 3 in this series were developed and set solely by ABSG. All projects were commissioned by GambleAware through a competitive funding process.

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