

research snapshot

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Lived experiences of suicidal behaviours among women with gambling disorder

What this research is about

Gambling disorder (GD) is an addictive disorder. It is often associated with other mental health conditions and suicidality. The latter refers to suicidal behaviours, including suicidal thoughts, plans, and attempts. In general, GD is associated with an increased risk of death by suicide. But knowledge on the suicidal process is lacking, especially among women with GD. From previous research, it seems harms related to gambling increase the risk of suicide attempts, rather than the level of problem gambling itself. Women with GD tend to suffer from mental health conditions, such as anxiety and depressive disorders. Suicidal thinking and attempts, as well as self-harm, are also more common in women with GD.

The goal of this study is to explore the lived experiences of suicidality among women with GD. The researchers also investigated factors involved in the development of suicidality among women with GD.

What the researchers did

The researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with seven women from Malmö, Sweden. The women were recruited from two regional outpatient treatment centers and one patient organization offering support groups for people with GD.

The interviews took place face-to-face in one of the regional outpatient treatment centers. They lasted between 1.5 and 2 hours and were held between November 2021 and June 2022. An interview guide was first created and adapted after the first interview. The interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis. The researchers identified themes from the interviews using content analysis.

What you need to know

Gambling disorder (GD) is linked with higher risk of suicidality in women. Suicidality refers to suicidal behaviours, including suicidal thoughts, plans, and attempts. This study explored the lived experiences of suicidality among women with GD. The researchers interviewed seven women. Several women experienced suicidality before GD due to mental health problems and life events. For some women, suicidality appeared due to the consequences of GD. Three main themes emerged from the interviews. The first one was guilt, shame, and self-stigmatization leading to suicidality. The second one was loss of control/chaotic life circumstances leading to suicidality. The third theme was social consequences/fear of guilt and shame from others leading to suicidality.

What the researchers found

The seven participants were all Swedish speakers. Three participants were aged 20–40, three were aged 41–65, and one was over 65 years old. They varied in ethnicities from different European regions. Participants also came from different socioeconomic backgrounds and had different sexual orientations. All had experienced suicidality (thoughts and/or actions). All participants qualified for a GD diagnosis according to the DSM-V manual.

All participants mentioned having experienced suicidality. This ranged from suicidal thoughts to life-threatening attempts. Some mentioned experiencing suicidality due to the consequences of their GD. Other mentioned previous suicide attempts due to mental

health problems and life events before developing GD. Many participants described traumatic life events during childhood and adult life. Several participants mentioned that gambling provided them with temporary relief from negative emotions. But this was usually accompanied by increased negative emotions after the gambling session.

Six women mentioned suicidality directly related to their GD. The following themes were identified from the interviews with those six participants:

- **Guilt, shame, and self-stigmatization mediating suicidality:** Many women described a pattern rooted in feelings of shame and guilt from their gambling. They also mentioned that the consequences of gambling played a role. These consequences included lies, financial hardship, and theft from others.
- **Loss of control/chaotic life circumstances mediating suicidality:** Many women also mentioned experiencing suicidality because of chaotic times in their lives. They described the consequences of gambling evoked a sense of loss of control, which had an impact on suicidality.
- **Social consequences/fear of guilt and shame from others mediating suicidality:** Many participants mentioned feelings of not fitting in and feeling invalidated or being offended by others' reaction to their gambling. They also described fear of homelessness and fear of being enrolled with the Enforcement Authority. In Sweden, the Enforcement Authority can decide whether a person should be subject to "debt enforcement". This may include deducting money from the person's salary or selling their possessions. Such consequences appeared to lead to suicidality in some women.

Overall, coming clear with loved ones appeared to be very stressful for many. Yet, once done, if participants felt like their loved ones showed understanding and empathy, they felt relief and seemed to experience decreased suicidality and increased well-being. Treatment seeking also appeared to be beneficial. Having contact with a therapist was seen as invaluable by many participants.

How you can use this research

This research can be used to better understand the link between GD and suicidality among women.

About the researchers

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Citation

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