Perceived absence of gambling problems and treatment unavailability are the most significant barriers to problem gambling treatment

What this research is about

Individuals who have a gambling disorder cannot control their impulse to gamble even after they have experienced financial, legal or social problems because of their gambling. Only about 1 in 10 problem gamblers seek help for gambling disorder, even though treatment is widely available and effective. Barriers that prevent gamblers from seeking help can be person-centred or situational. Gamblers who experience person-centred barriers may not be aware or have not accepted that they have a gambling problem. They may feel embarrassed and ashamed about their gambling problems, or are wary about treatment. Problem gamblers may also avoid treatment because of situational factors, such as lack of knowledge about treatment options or believing that treatment cost is high. In this study, the research team explored why callers to a gambling help-line, who thus have some motivation to seek help, do not initiate face-to-face treatment with a clinician after their call. They investigated the reasons that may encourage help-line callers to initiate treatment, as well as barriers that prevent them from seeking treatment.

What the researcher did

The participants of this study were 143 adult callers to a Problem Gambling Help-line in Michigan, United States. Help-line staff members asked callers if they would like to participate in the study. The research team interviewed callers who agreed to participate two weeks after their initial help-line call. During this telephone interview, the researchers used a questionnaire to identify if participants were pathological gamblers. The researchers

What you need to know

Problem gambling is a worldwide public health concern. People with gambling problems may experience severe financial, legal, and social difficulties. But less than 1 in 10 problem gamblers ever seek treatment. The research team explored the barriers that might prevent problem gamblers from seeking treatment, as well as reasons for initiating treatment. They interviewed 143 callers to the State of Michigan Problem Gambling Help-Line. They found that although problem gamblers might be motivated to get help, they faced many barriers that prevented them from initiating treatment with a clinician. Participants who reported more barriers to treatment were less likely to start treatment. Participants who did not seek treatment were more likely to report that they had no gambling problems or treatment was not available than participants who did. Problem gamblers who reported more reasons to seek treatment were more likely to begin treatment after their call. The most important reason for starting treatment was having positive views about the treatment. This research can be used by help-line counselors to identify and deal with barriers that callers may face so that gamblers feel empowered to seek treatment.
then contacted participants for a second interview two months later. They asked participants to list reasons that would make them more or less likely to seek treatment for their gambling problems. The researchers also administered a questionnaire to assess possible barriers to gambling treatment.

**What the researcher found**

Problem gamblers who did not begin face-to-face treatment after their help-line call reported more barriers to treatment compared to gamblers who did start treatment. Participants reported barriers such as believing that they did not have a gambling problem, that treatment was not available, and that they had scheduling conflicts. Participants who did not seek treatment were more likely to report that they did not have gambling problems or treatment was not available than participants who did.

Problem gamblers who sought treatment after calling the help-line reported more reasons for attending treatment compared to gamblers who did not begin treatment after their call. These reasons included having positive views about the treatment, believing that they would be able to relate to other treatment-seekers, and recognizing that they had a gambling problem.

**How you can use this research**

This research can be used by help-line counselors to identify and help gamblers deal with barriers to treatment initiation. Support from help-line counselors could encourage problem gamblers to follow through with referrals to treatment programs. Researchers in the gambling community should further investigate individual motivation for seeking treatment and identify the most significant barriers that hinder treatment initiation. This research could be used to develop effective strategies to address perceived barriers and promote treatment initiation among problem gamblers.

**About the Researcher**

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Barriers to treatment, attractions to treatment, problem gambling, gambling disorder, gambling help-line

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