

research snapshot

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The co-occurrence of an eating and gambling disorder and their shared risk factors

What this research is about

Past research has shown that eating disorders and gambling problems often co-occur. One common explanation is that these two conditions have similar risk factors such as impulsivity. However, research that investigates these co-occurring conditions is still limited. This study aimed to fill in the research gaps by examining the extent of the co-occurrence of eating disorders and gambling disorder in São Paulo, Brazil. The study also examined which demographic, psychiatric and personality factors were associated with these conditions.

What the researchers did

The researchers recruited 349 patients seeking treatment for gambling disorder. The participants completed self-report questionnaires and an interview. The questionnaires collected information about demographics, gambling, personality, and addictive behaviors. Demographic information included sex, age, ethnicity, marital status, sexual orientation, education, and income. Gambling information included age the participant first started to bet, time spent gambling, amount of money lost, gambling severity, and gambling beliefs (e.g. luck). Various personality traits were assessed such as impulsivity, harm avoidance, reward dependence, and cooperativeness. Addictive behaviors included problematic use of nicotine, drugs, alcohol, caffeine, exercise, shopping, food, work or gambling. The interview assessed eating disorders and psychiatric comorbidities such as panic or anxiety disorder.

What the researchers found

Results revealed that 11.5% of participants seeking treatment for gambling disorder had a binge/purge

What you need to know

This cross-sectional study examined the prevalence of an eating disorder in 349 patients who sought treatment for gambling disorder. The researchers also examined which demographic, psychiatric and personality factors were associated with this comorbidity. Results revealed that 11.5% of the participants had both conditions. Eating disorders were more common in women. Participants with both conditions gambled more frequently, had more irrational gambling beliefs and were more impulsive. They were also more likely to be diagnosed with a psychiatric condition or have an addictive behaviour. Clinicians may benefit from screening for both conditions to ensure targeted treatment. More research is needed to examine this trend in other countries and at-risk populations.

type eating disorder. Eating disorders were more common in women. The most common type of eating disorder was bulimia nervosa. Overall, participants with both conditions gambled more frequently and had more irrational gambling beliefs. However, there were no differences in gambling severity between those with only gambling disorder and those with gambling disorder and an eating disorder.

Participants with both conditions were also more likely to be impulsive. These participants were more likely to be diagnosed with a psychiatric diagnosis. Specifically, they were more likely to have a current depressive episode, panic disorder, agoraphobia, social anxiety, generalized anxiety, or suicidality. In addition, participants with both conditions reported

more problematic engagement in shopping, food bingeing, or food starving.

How you can use this research

Service providers could use this research to understand the unique profiles of people with dual diagnoses. This can improve identification and risk assessments. Information from this study could also enhance the development of tailored clinical programs and interventions. For instance, programs could include learning how to control impulsiveness and addictive behaviours. Future research should examine similar factors in another setting or country. This could help understand whether there may be cultural differences.

About the researchers

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Citation

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Gambling Research Exchange Ontario (GREO)

Gambling Research Exchange Ontario (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.

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