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Using photovoice to explore and illustrate recovery from problematic gambling

What this research is about

Problematic gambling affects more men than women in South Korea. It can negatively impact the person who gambles, their friends and family, and their community. People with problematic gambling are more likely to have mental and physical health problems. Additionally, people with problematic gambling are often disapproved and discriminated against. Recovery from problematic gambling can be very challenging. One way of understanding the process of recovery is using photovoice. Photovoice is the use of photographs to illustrate important issues to the individual. The aim of this study was to use photovoice to explore the lived experiences of men who problematically gambled and to better understand their recovery process.

What the researchers did

The researchers recruited seven men from a four-week residential programme for people with problematic gambling in South Korea. Participants needed to have problematic gambling, defined as a score greater than eight on the Canadian Problem Gambling Index, and have relapsed in the past year.

The participants completed six sessions of photovoice. The first session consisted of an introduction to photovoice, where participants learned about their role as participants in the project, and group discussion to select the themes they would like to take photos of and talk about in depth. The second to fifth sessions involved sharing the photos from the theme of the week, sharing the experiences underlying the photos, and discussing the next week's theme (if they wanted to change it). The final session involved sharing the photos with family members,

What you need to know

Photovoice is a method to understand the experiences of others through the use of photos. The aim of this study was to use photovoice to explore and give voice to South Korean men with problematic gambling. The seven participants in the study struggled with problematic gambling and had relapsed once in the past year. They participated in six sessions of photovoice while attending a residential programme. The sessions consisted of sharing photos and describing the relevance of the photos to their experiences and feelings. Four themes were discussed: my life after gambling, what I have lost from gambling, what would help my recovery, and picturing myself recovered in the near future. Twelve subthemes were also identified.

staff, and other people at the programme to increase awareness about the experiences of people with problematic gambling.

The data for this study included the participants' photos, audio transcripts of the sessions, and field notes taken by the researchers. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the transcripts. The transcripts were read thoroughly by the researchers to ensure they were familiar with the data. Codes were assigned to the transcripts according to the themes that the participants had selected. Then, subthemes were identified and the themes were reviewed.

What the researchers found

The four main themes identified by the participants were: 1) my life after gambling, 2) what I have lost

from gambling, 3) what would help my recovery, and 4) picture myself recovered in the near future.

“My life after gambling” consisted of two subthemes. The first, “I found myself completely changed”, dealt with the changes participants noticed in themselves when they started gambling. The changes included becoming hypervigilant, aggressive, isolative, and the loss of being a social member of their community. The second, “my life feels like hell after gambling”, addressed the negative consequences of gambling, including financial losses and relationship difficulties.

“What I have lost from gambling” consisted of four subthemes. The first was “financial well-being”. All participants had financial difficulties and debts because of their gambling. The second subtheme was “health”. Participants described that their health was impacted by gambling, including poor nutrition, poor sleep, and lack of physical activities. Some participants had physical problems arising from gambling-related stress, such as hair loss. The third subtheme was “trust in a relationship with people”. Participants expressed that gambling harmed their relationships with others because their gambling caused them to lie to get money to gamble or to hide their gambling. The fourth subtheme was “my ordinary daily life and purpose of life”. Participants felt that they missed out on hobbies and other normal aspects of their lives, and they had lost a sense of purpose in life.

“What would help my recovery” consisted of three subthemes. The first, “escaping the past”, revolved around the idea that recovery from gambling meant stopping previous habits and planning a new life. The second, “healthy life patterns and environments”, dealt with the need for healthy alternative activities to gambling. The third, “my motivation to stop gambling”, reflected the idea that participants thought they needed a strong motivation to recover.

“Picturing myself recovered in the near future” consisted of three subthemes. “Become hardworking” was the hope that participants would become accomplished in their careers and pay back their debts. “Having control over my life” meant that participants wanted to be able to handle their life

without gambling. “Enjoying a peaceful life” represented the hope that participants could enjoy an ordinary life in recovery from gambling.

How you can use this research

This study provided insight into the recovery experiences of men with problematic gambling. This research could be useful to treatment providers interested in the recovery process from the perspectives of people with problematic gambling.

About the researchers

Min Ah Kim is affiliated with Sungkyunkwan University in Seoul, South Korea. **JongSerl Chun** is affiliated with Ewha Womans University in Seoul, South Korea. **HaiSun Shim** is affiliated with Dongnam Health University in Suwon, South Korea. For more information about this study, please contact JongSerl Chun at jschun@ewha.ac.kr.

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