

research snapshot

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Rates of family violence among treatment-seeking gamblers and affected others in New Zealand

What this research is about

Problem gambling is defined as repetitive gambling that leads to negative effects, including loss of money, deception, loss of trust, and neglect of family responsibilities. Many studies have reported high rates of family violence among people living with gambling problems. Both gamblers and people who are affected by another person's gambling problems (the affected others) may be victims of family violence. They may also be the perpetrators who commit acts of violence.

No studies have examined the occurrence of family violence in people who seek help for gambling problems in New Zealand. As such, the aim of this study was to examine rates of family violence in adult gamblers and affected others who were seeking gambling treatment services in New Zealand. It also explored if patterns of family violence differed in men and women.

What the researchers did

The researchers recruited adults from three gambling treatment centres in New Zealand. The participants included 370 adults with gambling problems and 84 adults who were affected by another person's gambling problems. Each participant completed a survey that assessed their demographics, gambling behaviour, and occurrence of family violence in the past 12 months.

Demographics included gender, age, ethnicity, relationship status, and living arrangement. The Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI) was used to assess gambling behaviour and problems. The Hurt, Insulted, Threatened with harm, Screamed at (HITS) Scale was used to assess family violence. The HITS

What you need to know

This is the first study to report rates of family violence among people seeking gambling treatment services in New Zealand. Participants included people who sought help for their own gambling problems (the gamblers) or another person's gambling problems (the affected others). The results revealed high rates of family violence. Almost half of the gamblers (46.8%) and two-thirds of the affected others (65.5%) reported being a victim of family violence. Over two-fifths of the gamblers (41.2%) and more than half of the affected others (57.1%) reported that they had committed family violence. Compared to gamblers, affected others were more likely to be both the victim and perpetrator of family violence. The most common type of violence was verbal or emotional abuse. The most common relation between those involved in the violence was intimate partners. Compared to men, women were more likely to be both the victim and perpetrator of family violence. The results suggest that it is important for gambling treatment providers to screen for family violence. This could facilitate referrals to support services and improve health outcomes.

assessed verbal, emotional, and physical violence. An additional question was used to assess sexual abuse. The HITS was also adapted to assess the role of the participants as victim and perpetrator.

What the researchers found

According to the PGSI, three-quarters of the gamblers currently had gambling problems. Another 12% had

moderate risk of problem gambling. The majority of the affected others were non-gamblers or did not have gambling problems. However, about 16% of the affected others had gambling problems and another 10% had moderate risk. Most of the affected others sought help because of their partner's gambling problems. The most common gambling activity was electronic gaming machines, followed by casino table games, and betting on horse or dog races.

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Regardless of the type of violence, it most commonly occurred between the participant and their intimate partner. A small proportion of participants reported violence from or against their child or another relative (e.g., parents, siblings). Among gamblers, women were more likely to report being the victim and perpetrator of violence compared to men. Compared to gamblers, affected others were more likely to be both the victim and perpetrator of violence.

How you can use this research

This study reports high rates of family violence among people who seek help either for their own or someone else's gambling problems. Gambling treatment centres could screen for family violence among their clients. If family violence is reported, referrals could be made for supportive services. Building a collaborative approach between gambling treatment and other healthcare or supportive services could facilitate referral processes and improve health outcomes.

About the researchers

Katie Palmer du Preez, Maria Bellringer, Janet Pearson, Jane Koziol-Mclain, and Denise Wilson are affiliated with the Faculty of Health and Environmental Sciences at AUT University in Auckland, New Zealand. **Nicki Dowling** is affiliated with the Faculty of Health at Deakin University in Geelong, Australia, and the Melbourne Graduate School of Education at the University of Melbourne in Victoria, Australia. **Aino Suomi** and **Alun Jackson** are affiliated with the Melbourne Graduate School of Education at the University of Melbourne. For more information about this study, please contact Katie Palmer du Preez at katie.palmerdupreez@aut.ac.nz.

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