research snapshot

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Public stigma towards casino gambling, eSports gambling, and Internet gaming

What this research is about

Gambling disorder attracts stigma from the public. Public stigma can cause gamblers to feel shame, guilt, and low self-esteem. As a result, they may delay or avoid professional treatment. Different types of disordered gambling activities may attract different levels of public stigma. It is unclear if the stigma attached to traditional forms of gambling, like casino gambling, extends to new gambling options, like eSports gambling. eSports gambling involves betting on the outcomes of competitive video games.

Furthermore, concerns have been raised about Internet gaming among adolescents and young adults. Similar to gambling, playing computer games at an excessive level can lead to negative consequences (e.g., poor performance at school or work). But much is unknown about the stigma towards Internet gaming.

This study explored public stigma tied to problematic levels of casino gambling, eSports gambling, and Internet gaming. It compared the public stigma tied to these three addictive behaviours with the stigma felt towards someone having a financial crisis caused by risky decision-making.

What the researchers did

Participants were 504 adults from the United States. The researchers randomly assigned each participant to read one of four vignettes (brief stories). Three of the stories described a young white man who had a behavioural addiction (casino gambling, eSports gambling, or Internet gaming). In all of the stories, the man engaged in the addictive behaviour with increased intensity and when feeling distressed. He was preoccupied with the behaviour, had lied to hide the extent of his involvement in the behaviour, and had lost a job opportunity because of his excessive participation. The fourth story described a white young man suffering from similar level of problems. However, this man experienced financial stress caused by his decision to take out a large loan on a house before being fired from his job.

After reading the story, participants completed two assessments of public stigma. The Social Distance Scale (SDS) assessed the desired social distance they wanted to keep from the man described in the story.

What you need to know

This study compared the public stigma people might hold towards three types of addictive behaviours. Participants read a story about a casino gambler, an eSports gambler, an Internet gamer, or a person in a financial crisis. The casino gambler, eSports gambler, and Internet gamer attracted greater stigma than the person experiencing a financial crisis. Participants desired more social distance from the persons with an addictive behaviour, especially the casino gambler. Also, the persons with an addictive behaviour were seen as being able to control their behaviour. Thus, they caused more anger and less pity towards them than the person in a financial crisis. Participants viewed the casino gambler as more dangerous to be around than the Internet gamer. Differences between the eSports gambler and Internet gamer were less distinct. These findings provide information that could be used in interventions to reduce public stigma for gambling and other behavioural addictions.

The Attribution Questionnaire (AQ-27) assessed nine aspects of public stigma toward the man in the story (e.g., blame, anger, fear, pity). Participants also reported their previous experiences or contact with mental illness. Familiarity was thought to reduce the stigma one might have towards another person with mental health problems.

What the researchers found

Participants felt more stigma toward the men described as having an addictive behaviour than the person described as having a financial crisis. Participants desired the most social distance from the casino gambler, followed by the eSports gambler and the Internet gamer. Participants were most willing to be in social contact with the person in a financial crisis. Within the three addictive behaviours, participants desired more social distance from the casino gambler than from the Internet gamer.

Participants viewed the addictive behaviours as being highly controllable. The casino gambler, eSports gambler, and Internet gamer were all seen as more blameworthy, caused more anger in response to their problem, received less pity for their problem, were more avoided because of their problem, and were more likely to be forced into treatment for their problem.

Participants felt the casino gambler was more dangerous to be around than the Internet gamer and the person in a financial crisis, but was not very different from the eSports gambler. The eSports gambler was also seen as being more dangerous than the Internet gamer and the person in a financial crisis. Participants felt more fear towards the casino gambler than the Internet gamer and the person in a financial crisis. The eSports gambler was also more feared than the person in a financial crisis, but was not seen as more or less of a threat than the casino gambler or the Internet gambler. Also, the casino gambler was less likely to be helped than the person in a financial crisis.

How you can use this research

The findings of this study suggest that interventions to reduce public stigma of gambling disorders are needed. Reducing public stigma might improve the recovery process of people experiencing these problems. Interventions could target perceived levels of controllability of the problems. Interventions could also aim to correct perceptions regarding the felt danger or fear in response to gambling and other behavioural addictions.

About the researchers

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Citation

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