What this research is about

Youth gambling is becoming a problem in many countries around the world. This may be because teenagers can access gambling games more easily than ever. They are also exposed to new forms of gambling via the Internet and mobile phone.

There are many different risk factors that influence whether teenagers will gamble. These include being male, having easy access to gambling venues, having depression or anxiety, and poor coping skills. Teenagers with parents or family members who gamble are also more likely to gamble. Since youth gambling can lead to many negative consequences, school-based gambling prevention programs have been offered. These programs use different approaches including lectures, group discussions, games and exercises.

Research shows that gambling prevention programs can increase teenagers’ knowledge and change their attitudes about gambling. But, few studies have examined if the programs can change gambling behaviour in the long term. In this study, the researchers investigated the long-term effects of a school-based gambling prevention program called “Don’t Gamble Away Our Future” (DGAOF). The researchers examined if the program could increase gambling knowledge and reduce the number of children and teenagers with problem gambling.

What the researchers did

The researchers reached out to 90 schools and detention centres in Midwestern Illinois, United States, to determine which ones ran the DGAOF program between 2005 and 2009. There were 65 primary and high schools, 1 detention centre, and 1 youth prison that ran the program during this time. Students in the program were in grades 3 to 12 (8 to 18 years old). Students were invited to attend the program once a year. They could attend the program multiple times over the years they attended school.

The program was held in classrooms with about 30 students in each group. Students completed a questionnaire before they started the program, also known as a pre-test. The questionnaire tested their knowledge about gambling. They then watched a presentation and participated in discussion and games. Students completed a questionnaire about their gambling knowledge after the program, also known as a post-test.

What you need to know

The researchers investigated whether a gambling prevention program called “Don’t Gamble Away Our Future” (DGAOF) could increase awareness about gambling issues among youth. They also explored if it could reduce the risk of problem gambling. The researchers reviewed pre- and post-test responses from students aged 8 to 18, who attended the program between 2005 and 2009. Students who completed the program twice or more had better knowledge of gambling issues than those who did the program once. The number of students with problem gambling decreased among those attending the program twice compared to those attending it once. These findings suggest that the DGAOF program raises awareness about gambling and its negative effects in the short term (immediately after the program) and in the long term. The program is more effective if students complete it more than once.
known as a post-test. Those in Grade 5 or above also completed the Modified South Oaks Gambling Screen for Teens (MSOGST) at the end of the program. The MSOGST assessed their gambling behaviour to determine if they had gambling problems. In addition, students took home a parent packet, which included a letter about the DGAOF program and a fact sheet about gambling. The researchers analyzed the pre- and post-test responses of 16,262 students. They also analyzed the MSOGST responses of 16,421 students.

What the researchers found

Most of the students (76%) who participated in the DGAOF program were in high school. About one in five students attended the program twice or more.

Students had more knowledge about gambling after they completed the DGAOF program compared to before they started it. Students who attended the program twice or more did better on the pre-test than those who attended only once. This finding suggests that students remembered the information they learned before. It also suggests that the program had limited effect on students who did not previously attend the program through peer education.

Compared to students who attended the DGAOF program once, students who attended the program twice or more did better on both the pre-test and post-test. There was a trend of increasing awareness of gambling issues among students who attended the program multiple times. The prevalence of problem gambling was 9.4%, 7.9%, and 8.8% among students attending the program once, twice, and three or more times, respectively. Students who attended the program once were more likely to develop problem gambling than students who did the program twice. Males and students in detention centre were also more likely to develop problem gambling.

How you can use this research

The Illinois Institute for Addiction Recovery (IIAR) could use this research as evidence that the DGAOF program has both short-term and long-term effects. Service providers could deliver gambling prevention programs to teenagers more than once. They could also consider the effects of parental gambling. Policy makers could consider making gambling prevention a topic that is taught in classrooms.

About the researchers

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