

research snapshot

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Relationships between stimulant use and gambling among adolescents

What this research is about

Adolescents are exposed to and may experiment with problematic and risky behaviours, like gambling or substance use. These high-risk behaviours can have many short- and long-term negative consequences.

Gambling and substance use are high-risk behaviours that often occur together. For instance, past research has found associations between alcohol use, marijuana use, and problem gambling in adolescents. However, there is little research on the possible associations between stimulant use (e.g., amphetamines or cocaine) and gambling. The current study examined the relationship between stimulant use and gambling among high-school students in USA.

What the researchers did

The researchers used data from the 2016 Alcohol, Drug Addiction and Mental Health Services (ADAMHS) Board/Wood County Education Service Center Survey on Alcohol and Other Drug Use. Respondents were 6,542 high-school students aged 12 to 19 years.

The survey asked about stimulant use over the past year, including how often and the type of stimulant used. The types of stimulants included in the survey were: powdered cocaine, crack cocaine, methamphetamine (speed, crystal, crank), non-medical use of prescription stimulants (trade names of Ritalin, Adderall, Concerta, or Vyvance), and MDMA (molly, ecstasy, E). The survey captured how often the adolescents participated in 11 gambling activities. These included buying lottery tickets, playing card games for money, online poker, and betting on games of skills. The survey also assessed how severe the adolescents' gambling problems were.

What you need to know

Research exploring the possible associations between stimulant drug use and gambling is scarce. The current study found that the use of any stimulant drug increased the likelihood of frequent gambling and at-risk/problem gambling among both male and female high-school students. Adolescents who used stimulants often (six or more times in the past year) were at high risk of being frequent gamblers and at-risk/problem gamblers. Use of crack cocaine increased the risk of frequent gambling the most, and use of methamphetamines increased the risk of at-risk/problem gambling the most.

The researchers analyzed the relationships between stimulant use (type of stimulant used and how often) and gambling behaviours (frequent gambling, at-risk/problem gambling). They examined if the relationships differed by gender.

What the researchers found

About 4.9% of the adolescents reported having used at least one stimulant in the past year. Almost one in three adolescents (29.6%) had gambled in the past year. Further, about 13% were frequent gamblers, and 6.7% were identified as having at-risk or problem gambling. The use of any stimulant drug over the past year increased the likelihood of both males and females being at-risk/problem gamblers. For males, the use of all types of stimulant drugs increased the likelihood of having at-risk/problem gambling. For females, non-medical use of prescription stimulants and MDMA were the only two types of stimulants that did not increase this likelihood.

The stimulant drug that most increased the likelihood of at-risk/problem gambling was methamphetamine. Males using methamphetamines were 10.7 times more likely to be at-risk/problem gamblers than males not using stimulants. Females using methamphetamines were 4 times more likely to be at-risk/problem gamblers than females not using stimulants.

The use of any stimulant drug also increased the likelihood of both males and females being frequent gamblers. The stimulant drug that most increased the likelihood of frequent gambling was crack cocaine. Males using crack cocaine were 8.3 times more likely to be frequent gamblers than males not using stimulants. Females using crack cocaine were 18.4 times more likely to be frequent gamblers than females not using stimulants.

Compared to adolescents who did not use stimulants, adolescents who used stimulants 1-5 times during the past year were 1.4 times more likely to be at-risk/problem gamblers. Those using stimulants 6 or more times were 4.7 times more likely to be at-risk/problem gamblers. Adolescents who used stimulants 1-5 times in the past year were 2.7 times more likely to gamble more than once a month. Those using stimulants 6 or more times were 6.2 times more likely to be frequent gamblers.

How you can use this research

This study provides insight into the relationships between stimulant use and gambling among adolescents. Mental health counselors, social workers, and psychologists working in high-school settings or with adolescents could screen for gambling and stimulant drug use and address these risky behaviours. Future research could investigate the risks posed by different stimulant drugs in worsening problem gambling behaviours among adolescents.

About the researchers

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