

research snapshot

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Alcohol misuse in people seeking treatment for pathological gambling in the UK

What this research is about

Many people with pathological gambling also struggle with alcohol misuse. Most of the research on the prevalence of alcohol misuse in people with pathological gambling comes from North America. There is little data from the United Kingdom (UK).

The aim of this study was to examine the prevalence of alcohol misuse in people who were seeking treatment for pathological gambling in the UK. The researchers also looked at whether alcohol misuse was associated with more severe gambling problems and psychological distress.

What the researchers did

The researchers examined electronic health records of patients attending the UK National Problem Gambling Clinic from November 13, 2019 to February 13, 2020. People diagnosed with pathological gambling were included in the analysis. Diagnosis was made according to the International Classification of Diseases, 10th revision (ICD-10).

During the initial assessment, patients completed several questionnaires. The Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI) was used to measure gambling severity. The Clinical Outcomes in Routine Evaluation-10 (CORE-10) was used to assess psychological distress. The Alcohol Use Disorder Identification Test (AUDIT) was used to assess alcohol misuse. Scores on the AUDIT were used to categorize participants into scoring positively or negatively for alcohol misuse. Score of 8 or higher indicated positive screening. Score lower than 8 indicated negative screening. AUDIT scores could also be used to categorize a person's drinking into low-risk (score 1–7), hazardous

What you need to know

Research has shown that people with pathological gambling frequently have problems with alcohol misuse. However, most of this research comes from North America. The aim of this study was to examine alcohol misuse in people seeking treatment for pathological gambling in the UK. The researchers used electronic health records from the UK National Problem Gambling Clinic. A total of 108 adults who were diagnosed with pathological gambling were included in the study. Participants completed questionnaires that measured their gambling severity, psychological distress, and alcohol misuse during their initial assessment. Approximately 27% of the participants screened positive for alcohol misuse. Psychological distress and gambling severity did not differ between those with and without alcohol misuse. A greater proportion of participants were categorized as probably dependent on alcohol compared to the general UK population (6.3% vs. 1.2%).

(score 8–15), harmful (score 16–19), and probable dependence (score of 20 or higher).

The researchers also used data from the 2014 Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey to compare the prevalence of alcohol misuse in their sample to the general UK population.

What the researchers found

A total of 108 participants were included in the analysis. About 90.7% of the participants were men. The average age of the participants was 39.3 years.

About one in four participants (27.1%) screened positive for alcohol misuse. Almost half (44.8%) used alcohol at a low-risk level. About 16.7% used alcohol at a hazardous level. Another 4.2% used alcohol at a harmful level. In addition, 6.3% scored as probable alcohol dependence. About 28.1% of the participants did not use alcohol at all.

The researchers found that there were no differences in gambling severity between participants with alcohol misuse and those without. In other words, those with alcohol misuse did not have more severe gambling problems than those without alcohol misuse. They also found that there were no differences in psychological distress (measured by the CORE-10) between those with alcohol misuse and those without.

The researchers also compared the proportion of participants in different AUDIT categories to the proportion of the general UK population in different AUDIT categories. The proportions of participants who were abstinent, who had hazardous drinking, and who had harmful drinking were not different than the proportions of these categories in the general UK population. However, there was a greater proportion of participants compared to the general UK population in the probable alcohol dependence category (6.3% vs. 1.2%). There was a lower proportion of participants compared to the general UK population in the low-risk drinking category (44.8% vs. 57.5%).

How you can use this research

This study could be useful to researchers interested in alcohol misuse in people with pathological gambling. This study represents one of the first to present this type of data for the UK population. The results of this study suggest that alcohol misuse is a significant concern for many people with pathological gambling. Alcohol misuse needs to be properly screened for and treated in people who struggle with gambling problems.

About the researchers

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Citation

Roberts, E., Leonidaki, V., Delaney, Z., & Bowden-Jones, H. (2021). Alcohol misuse in a treatment-seeking sample of pathological gamblers. *Journal of Gambling Issues*, 48, 212-218.
<https://doi.org/10.4309/jgi.2021.48.10>

Study funding

This study was supported by funding from the Medical Research Council.

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