

research snapshot

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Detailed questionnaires are better at detecting help-seeking among gamblers

What this research is about

Help-seeking is when people take action to manage or treat their health problems. Contrary to popular belief, many gamblers seek help for their gambling problems. Gamblers may seek help from a psychologist, telephone helplines, their doctor, or their family and friends. Studies suggest that anywhere between 8% and 60% of gamblers in Australia seek help. The large differences in these estimates may be because researchers use different questionnaires to identify gamblers who seek help for their gambling problems.

Some questionnaires that researchers use have more detail. Detailed questionnaires ask gamblers several questions to determine if they have used one or more types of help in the past. Other questionnaires are less detailed and only ask one question to determine if gamblers have ever sought help. Less detailed questionnaires may underestimate help-seeking behaviour. Researchers may also use different timelines to assess people's help-seeking behaviour. For example, some studies ask if people have sought help within the last four weeks, while others ask if they have ever sought help in their lifetime.

In this study, the researchers developed a questionnaire with a list of help-seeking options. The researchers compared help-seeking rates using this detailed questionnaire versus using a single question. The researchers also explored if help-seeking rates changed after a four-week period.

What the researchers did

The researchers recruited participants from an Australian online counselling service called Gambling Help Online. Participants were 175 men and 103

What you need to know

In this study, the researchers compared help-seeking rates using a detailed questionnaire with a list of options versus a single question. They recruited 277 gamblers who were seeking help online. Participants completed one question that asked if they had sought help in the past and a more detailed Help-Seeking Questionnaire (HSQ) with 14 questions. The HSQ lists different distance-based, face-to-face, and self-directed options. The researchers found a much higher help-seeking rate based on the HSQ (70%) compared to the single question (22%). Further, 93% of participants had used a self-directed option such as seeking support from family and friends. At four weeks later, 97% of participants had used at least one of the help-seeking options listed on the HSQ.

women who were seeking online help for their gambling problems.

Participants completed an online registration form that asked them one question. The question asked if they had ever sought help for their gambling. The researchers sent participants a questionnaire called the Help-Seeking Questionnaire (HSQ) 24 hours later. The HSQ had 14 questions. It asked participants how often they had sought help in the past and gave them a list of help-seeking options. The options included: 1) distance-based services such as telephone or online services; 2) face-to-face services with a psychologist or self-help group; and 3) self-directed actions such as seeking social support from friends and family. The HSQ asked participants how many times they had tried the listed help-seeking options in the past.

Four weeks later, the researchers sent participants the HSQ again and asked them how often they had sought the various help-seeking options in the past month. There were 129 participants who completed the HSQ four weeks later.

What the researchers found

Based on the HSQ, 70% of participants had sought help in the past. Many participants said they used distance-based services (61%) or face-to-face services (43%). Participants used helplines and face-to-face counselling with a psychologist most often. Most participants (93%) had used a self-directed option before they tried the online counselling service.

On the registration form with a single question on help-seeking, only 22% of participants indicated they had sought help in the past. Thus, about 4 in 5 participants said they had never sought help for their gambling in the past. However, 3 in 5 of these same participants indicated they actually did seek help on the HSQ. Of those participants who originally said they did not seek help, about 1 in 3 had used a face-to-face service and 1 in 2 had used a distance-based service. These findings suggest that more people report seeking help for their gambling problems when they complete a detailed questionnaire that provides a full list of help-seeking options. This may be because detailed questionnaires clearly explain what seeking help for gambling means. As a result, gamblers can accurately report the help they have used in the past.

After four weeks, most participants (97%) said they had used at least one help-seeking option in the past month. About 1 in 2 participants had used distance-based services. About 1 in 3 participants had used face-to-face services. Participants used an average of five different help-seeking options. These findings suggest that gamblers are active help-seekers.

How you can use this research

Prevention and treatment service providers could use this research to support gamblers in help-seeking. Service providers could let gamblers know about the services available to them and support them in their help-seeking needs. The researchers proposed a screening questionnaire with one question to ask

gamblers if they have used face-to-face services, distance-based services, or self-directed activities in the past. Alternatively, the screening questionnaire could have three questions listing those options. Gamblers who said yes could then be given the HSQ to gain a more complete picture of their help-seeking.

About the researchers

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Citation

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About Gambling Research Exchange (GREO)

Gambling Research Exchange (GREO) has partnered with the Knowledge Mobilization Unit at York University to produce Research Snapshots. GREO is an independent knowledge translation and exchange organization that aims to eliminate harm from gambling. Our goal is to support evidence-informed decision making in safer gambling policies, standards, and practices. The work we do is intended for researchers, policy makers, gambling regulators and operators, and treatment and prevention service providers.

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