

research snapshot

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Exploring family members' experiences with and reasons for wanting online gambling treatment services

What this research is about

This research explores family members' experiences with an online gambling treatment service and their reasons for wanting online help. Problem gambling (PG) is repetitive gambling behaviour that leads to gambling harms such as money problems, relationship issues, and violence. Gambling harm affects people with PG as well as their families.

There are two ways to help families of a person with PG. One approach is gambler-focused and aims to help family members to support the person with PG. Treatment service providers tell families how they can encourage the person with PG to get help and make changes. Evidence suggests that families play an important role in helping their relatives recover from PG. The second approach is family-focused. Treatment service providers help families find more effective coping strategies and reduce their stress. Evidence suggests that one in five people in gambling treatment are family members of a person with PG. Some approaches are both gambler-focused and family-focused.

Few studies explore why families seek help and what types of treatment or support they want. Online treatment services offer many different types of support through email, online chat, and discussion forums. There is no evidence about whether online treatment services meet the needs of families. In this study, the researchers explored family members' experiences with an online counselling service and the different types of treatment services they had used in the past. They investigated why families seek online help and if their reasons correspond with a gambler-focused or a family-focused approach.

What you need to know

This research explores families' experiences with an online gambling treatment service and their reasons for wanting online help. The researchers surveyed 62 family members of people with problem gambling (PG) from an internet counselling service in Australia. The survey asked them why they decided to get online gambling help and what they expected to receive from online services. Half of the participants wanted gambler-focused treatment to better support their family member with PG. Almost one-third wanted family-focused treatment to have someone listen to their story and needs, to know more about support options, and to manage the impacts of PG. Some participants (22%) wanted a blend of both.

What the researchers did

The researchers recruited 62 family members from an internet counselling and support service in Australia called Gambling Help Online. Participants were family members or friends of people who had a gambling problem. They had previously done at least one type of online treatment including chat-based counselling, email support, or a peer-to-peer forum.

Participants completed an online survey. The survey asked them for their demographic information such as their age and gender. It assessed what types of gambling services they received in the past or were currently receiving. Three open-ended questions asked why they decided to seek online gambling help, what help they expected to receive, and what information they would like to receive in the future. The survey used the Problem Gambling Significant

Other Impact Scale and the Problem Gambling Family Impact Measure to assess how much PG affected the family members. The Social Support Scale determined how much support participants got from their neighbours and friends. The Help-Seeking Checklist assessed treatment services they had used before they did the online treatment. The Development of the Reasons for Family Help-Seeking Checklist asked participants to identify the most important reasons why they sought help with Gambling Help Online.

What the researchers found

Gambling problems negatively impacted participants' relationships and emotions. Many participants reported a low level of social support. For example, they did not think their neighbours could offer them support. Most participants used at least one type of treatment service or support before they used the online counselling service. The most common were self-directed options (e.g., reading website information). Many participants also used online or face-to-face treatment services (e.g., talking to a gambling counsellor). The most important reason why participants sought help was to reduce how much time and money their family member spent gambling. Participants also wanted to improve their relationship with their family member. Many thought it was important to get their family member into treatment.

Half of the participants wanted gambler-focused treatment so they could better support their family member with PG. Some participants preferred family-focused treatment (28%) or a blend of both (22%). The most common reason why participants wanted family-focused treatment was to have someone listen to their story and needs. They also wanted to know more about support options (e.g., legal and financial advice) and how to improve their coping skills.

How you can use this research

This study could inform researchers and treatment services. Service providers could create a variety of treatment services for family members that target the specific gambling harms that families are facing. They could use both gambler-focused and family-focused approaches because families have different needs.

About the researchers

Simone N. Rodda is affiliated with the School of Population Health at the University of Auckland in Auckland, New Zealand. **Nicki A. Dowling** is affiliated with the School of Psychology at Deakin University in Geelong, Australia. **Anna C. Thomas** is affiliated with RMIT University in Melbourne, Australia. **Kathleen L. Bagot** is affiliated with The Florey Institute of Neuroscience and Mental Health at the University of Melbourne in Heidelberg, Australia. **Dan I. Lubman** is affiliated with Turning Point with Eastern Health in Richmond, Victoria, Australia. For more information about this study, please contact Simone N. Rodda at s.rodde@auckland.ac.nz.

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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