

# research snapshot

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## Shame, guilt, and stigma: Gambling problems related to pachinko and pachislot in Japan

### What this research is about

In Japan, pachinko and pachislot are popular forms of entertainment that are available in nearby shops. Pachinko is a hybrid of pinball and slot machines where small metal balls are launched into a track to release more balls. Pachislot is similar to slot machines with buttons that allow people to stop the wheels from spinning. These machines give out small prizes which can be exchanged for money. Pachinko and pachislot are not considered gambling in Japan.

The labelling of pachinko and pachislot as entertainment neglects the harms that they can bring. It also contributes to the stigmatisation of people who experience harms from these activities, such as being irresponsible and lacking in self-control. Moreover, people who experience harms may internalise the stigma and blame themselves for the problems. Feelings of shame and guilt can prevent people from seeking help. This is especially the case when such feelings are coupled with the fear of losing face and being socially excluded in the Japanese culture.

This study explored the lived experiences of people with gambling problems related to pachinko and pachislot. Specifically, it explored shame, guilt, and stigma, and how they act as barriers to recovery.

### What the researchers did

The researchers held two group interviews in 2019 with seven men and one woman aged 30 to 60 years. The interviews took place at gambling-specific self-help and treatment settings in urban areas. Each interview lasted about 1.5 hours and was audio-recorded. The researchers used narrative analysis to explore how participants made sense of their experiences and dealt with shame, guilt, and stigma.

### What you need to know

Pachinko and pachislot are considered forms of entertainment rather than gambling in Japan. This labelling neglects the harms that they can bring. The researchers held two group interviews with eight people who experienced problems related to pachinko and pachislot. Participants connected their gambling problems to feelings of shame and guilt. They experienced social stigma whereby their family and others around them saw the gambling problems as stemming from a weak character. Participants also experienced self-stigma in which they blamed themselves for the problems. Shame, guilt, and stigma hindered their efforts to seek help and begin recovery.

### What the researchers found

#### *Getting into the zone and the loss of control and self*

Participants described how gambling at the pachinko parlours started as something fun and relaxing. It provided a space where they could forget their daily stresses. Past research had described this as “getting into the zone”. Participants continued to gamble to be in the zone because it offered them a sense of control and peace against the chaos of outside world.

Participants cut off social interactions with family and friends as they spent more time and money at the pachinko parlours. They also prioritised gambling over other needs, including food and sleep. Some participants described losing their normal self, their identity, and their pride. Participants mentioned making many attempts to decrease gambling on their own, such as limiting time and leaving credit card at home. When these attempts failed, their gambling

escalated. Participants faced many negative consequences, including debts, loss of job, and homelessness.

#### *Shame, guilt, and stigma in the recovery process*

In the Japanese culture, shame does not only affect the individual but also their family. For some participants, feelings of shame increased with the stigmatisation from family and others around them. They were viewed as having a weak character and a disgrace to their family. Some participants internalised these negative views in a process of self-stigma. Other participants expressed guilt rather than shame. One participant mentioned that he was not ashamed of his gambling because it was his choice, but he felt guilty about how it had affected his family.

Participants felt that gambling problems are viewed differently from other mental health problems in Japan. Gambling problems are framed as something that people have done to themselves and judged as more shameful. But, some participants resisted the idea that gambling problems are caused by an individual's weak character. Participants mentioned not knowing where to seek help, as well as a lack of knowledge about gambling problems among health care professionals and the general public. This lack of knowledge along with the stigma, shame, and guilt prevented participants from seeking help.

Participants described a need for greater knowledge of gambling problems among professionals and the general public. One participant also mentioned a need for changes in gambling policy in Japan, including restricting loans and limiting gambling opportunities. Participants said it is important to offer concrete help with finance at the initial stage of treatment. They appreciated a non-judgemental approach that is free of shaming and able to address the stigma.

#### **How you can use this research**

This study suggests a need to address shame, guilt and stigma and support people with gambling problems to rebuild their identity and relationships. There is also a need for further research on pachinko and pachislot using a sociocultural approach.

#### **About the researchers**

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#### **Citation**

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#### **About Greo**

Greo has partnered with the Knowledge Mobilization Unit at York University to produce Research Snapshots. Greo is an independent knowledge translation and exchange organization with almost two decades of international experience in generating, synthesizing, and mobilizing research into action across the health and wellbeing sectors. Greo helps organizations improve their strategies, policies, and practices by harnessing the power of evidence and stakeholder insight.

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