What this research is about

Research has shown that pathological gamblers are more likely to smoke, drink alcohol and use drugs than non-gamblers. Pathological gamblers are also at higher risk of having other mental health disorders like depression. It is important to recognize disorders that may affect pathological gamblers to inform prevention and treatment of problem gambling. This study examined the prevalence of mental health disorders in treatment seeking pathological gamblers in South Africa.

What the researcher did

Study participants were adults from the National Responsible Gambling Programme in South Africa. This program aimed to help prevent and treat problem gambling. A total of 200 male and female gamblers were interviewed about their gambling behaviours and other mental health disorders. They also completed questionnaires on gambling severity and impacts on their work and personal life.

Researchers identified how many pathological gamblers had other mental health disorders and what types were most frequent.

What the researcher found

Approximately 42% of pathological gamblers also had other mental health disorders. The most common disorders were major depressive disorder, anxiety disorders and substance use disorders.

Female pathological gamblers were more likely to have major depressive disorder or anxiety disorders than male pathological gamblers. Females were also more likely to start gambling later in life, develop a problem and get help. Females preferred to gamble on slot machines in casinos.

Gamblers felt that their gambling had the most negative effect on family and home life.

South African pathological gamblers were also likely to have a higher risk of suicide than the average South African.

How you can use this research

Pathological gambling is related to many mental health and substance use disorders. Mental health disorders may be a risk factor or a result of pathological gambling. Treatment providers should screen for other mental health disorders, especially major depressive disorder. Health promoters may use this information to develop strategies that address the different needs of male and female gamblers.

About the Researcher

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Gambling Research Exchange Ontario (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 responsible 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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