Family functioning and gambling problems in young adulthood

What this research is about

Young adults are at high risk of developing gambling problems. There is a need to further develop ways to effectively prevent and treat gambling problems in this group. Past research has found that good family functioning is associated with less gambling problems among adolescents. However, little is known about whether and which family factors impact young adults’ gambling problems.

The current study examined the relationship between gambling problems and two features of family functioning: effectiveness of problem-solving in the family and concordance of values. Concordance of values is the agreement of common values or acceptance of differences in opinions between the individual and their family. Families with more effective problem-solving skills might better support their members with gambling problems. High agreement of values might lower feelings of shame and judgement, which might make it easier for problem gamblers to talk about their problems and seek family support.

What the researchers did

The researchers used data from the Munich Leisure-time Study, an online survey on young male gamblers. Participants completed survey at the beginning of the study (T0), 12-months (T1) and 24-months (T2) later.

Participants were 173 male gamblers, aged 18 to 25 years. They were recruited from a citizen’s registry or through Facebook. All participants completed a screening survey about their sociodemographics (age, marital status, occupation, living with parents) and gambling behaviour (frequency and symptoms of problem gambling). At T0 for participants from the citizen’s registry or at T1 for Facebook participants, the survey assessed the effectiveness of problem-solving in the family and concordance of values using the Family Assessment Measure (FAM). At all time points, the survey assessed gambling problems using the South Oaks Gambling Screen (SOGS).

Additionally, at T0, the survey assessed two known risk factors for gambling: psychological distress and impulsiveness. Impulsiveness is a tendency to act rashly without planning. Some studies have reported that problem gamblers are more impulsive than non-problem gamblers. Further, problem gamblers tend to have more psychological distress.

The researchers first analyzed the effects of family functioning on gambling problems. Then, they examined whether family functioning predicted the development of gambling problems 12 months later. The researchers took into consideration psychological..

What you need to know

This study examined if good family functioning could protect young male gamblers from problem gambling. The results showed that effective problem-solving in the family was related to less gambling problems. This effect was mediated by concordance of values (perceived agreement of values between the individual and their family). This suggests that in families with effective problem-solving, common family values might help family members recognize and react to signs of gambling problems. However, a lack of common family values might increase feelings of shame and prevent problem gamblers from seeking support.
distress and impulsiveness during analyses to control for the effects of these factors on the relationship between family functioning and gambling problems.

What the researchers found

Young adult male gamblers with effective problem-solving in the family had less gambling problems than those with ineffective problem-solving in the family. Young adult male gamblers with effective problem-solving in the family were also less likely to have gambling problems at 12 months later. This relationship was mediated by concordance of values.

The results suggest that in families with effective problem-solving, young adult male gamblers felt the agreement of values between themselves and their family to a higher extent. This might decrease the feelings of shame related to gambling problems, making them more likely to seek the support of their family. Family members might also be able to better recognize and react to signs of gambling problems.

How you can use this research

The findings suggest that good family functioning is important in the prevention and treatment of gambling problems among young adults. Public health could raise awareness about gambling problems among family members. A better understanding might make it easier for families to recognize gambling problems in their loved ones.

Prevention programs could also help families to motivate young adults with gambling problems to seek help. Treatment providers could include family members in the treatment process as a support for young adult problem gamblers. Also, treatment providers could consider the role of family in the treatment process, as a lack of agreement of family values might lower the effectiveness of interventions.

About the researchers

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