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Harms and long-term effects of being exposed to parental gambling during childhood

What this research is about

Having parents who gamble can have negative impacts on children. Over 10% of the Australian child population is exposed to parental problem gambling. There is evidence that six areas of child wellbeing can be affected by parental problem gambling. These areas are (1) psychological, (2) relational, (3) violence exposure, (4) behavioural, (5) financial, and (6) untreated physical health conditions.

Studies have shown the potential of transmission of gambling across generations. This means that children of people who gamble develop gambling problems themselves. However, even if there is a higher risk, only a small proportion of these children develop gambling problems themselves. This shows the interplay between risk and protective factors.

The purpose of this study was to examine the specific harms due to regular parental gambling. It also examined the extent to which parental factors are linked to harms experienced during childhood. Finally, the study explored how the harms caused by parental gambling in childhood affect later life outcomes.

What the researchers did

This study surveyed 211 Australian adults. Participants were on average 36.1 years old, and 68% were women. Of this sample, 8% had not completed high school, 15% had a high school degree, 54% had a university degree, and 22% had another post-school qualification. The researchers looked at gambling harms, parental factors, and current wellbeing.

Gambling harms: The researchers assessed eight types of harms. These harms were (1) physical abuse; (2) verbal abuse; (3) being left unsupervised; (4) not

What you need to know

It is known that gambling has negative impacts on children's wellbeing. Yet, little is known about the specific harms that children suffer. This study seeks to understand gambling harms that are directly attributed to regular parental gambling and how these harms affect later life outcomes. The researchers explored this in key areas of child wellbeing. The researchers used data from a national survey of Australian adults exposed to parental gambling as children. The results show high levels of psychological, relational, and financial harms, as well as abuse and neglect. Harmful impacts from parental gambling affected later life outcomes as adults.

enough money; (5) witnessing violence; (6) child welfare services contacted; (7) distress or upset; and (8) relationship problems with the gambling parent.

Parental factors: The researchers assessed the severity of parental gambling by adapting the Children of Alcoholics Screening Test (CAST-6) to the gambling context. They assessed if both parents gambled, and if so, what the gender of the parent with more severe gambling problems was. The researchers also assessed years being exposed to parental gambling as well as responsive parenting.

Current wellbeing: The researchers assessed depression, anxiety, general health, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in adulthood. They also assessed intimate partner violence (IPV), alcohol abuse, smoking, drug use, and the participants' own gambling habits.

What the researchers found

The most reported harm attributed to parental gambling was emotional distress. This was followed by difficulties in the relationship with the parent who gambled, not having enough money, and being left unsupervised. Almost half of the participants reported verbal abuse. About one-third reported witnessing violence. The least common harms were physical abuse and calling child welfare services.

The severity of parental gambling was positively associated with each of the eight harm items. Responsive parenting was negatively associated with each of the harm items. The only exception was calling child welfare service. Having two parents who gambled increased the chance of being left unsupervised. Furthermore, having mother as the parent with more severe gambling problems increased the chances of being left unsupervised, emotional distress, and relationship problems.

The eight gambling harm items were linked with all wellbeing outcomes in adulthood. The only exceptions were general health and smoking. Having parents who gambled increased the chance for PTSD. Yet, it was negatively associated with the participants' own lifetime gambling habits. Having two parents who gambled increased the chance of IPV victimization. Responsive parenting lowered the risk of depression, anxiety, PTSD, and IPV victimization and perpetuation in adulthood. Having mother as the parent with more severe gambling problems led to higher risk for depression, anxiety, and IPV victimization and perpetuation.

After taking into account all factors, having a mother who gambled increased the risk for lifetime gambling problems, anxiety, and IPV perpetration as adults, compared to having a father who gambled. Low levels of responsive parenting predicted depression symptoms in adulthood. Verbal abuse due to parental gambling positively predicted PTSD symptoms. Verbal abuse, maternal gambling, and low levels of responsive parenting predicted IPV victimization.

How you can use this research

This research can be used to better understand the long-term impacts of parental gambling on children.

About the researchers

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Citation

Suomi, A., Lucas, N., Dowling, N., & Delfabbro, P. (2023). Gambling harm experienced by children exposed to parental gambling: An online survey of Australians. *Journal of Gambling Studies*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10899-023-10211-4>

Study funding

This study was funded by the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation. Open access funding was provided by CAUL and its Member Institutions.

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