

research snapshot

summarize | mobilize



Family violence, including intimate partner violence, is common among problem gamblers

What this research is about

Problem gambling is a disorder where people cannot control their urge to gamble. Problem gamblers, their family members and significant others may experience negative impacts. These impacts can include financial problems, emotional stress, health issues, and family conflicts.

Research suggests that people with problem gambling are often victims and/or perpetrators of family violence. Intimate partner violence is a type of family violence that is studied more often. Research is still unclear about the direction of the relationship between problem gambling and family violence. For example, negative impacts of problem gambling may lead to violence by the gambler against family members or by a family member against the gambler. Victims of family violence may use gambling to escape from their situation. Family violence can also be bi-directional where the victim is also the perpetrator.

In this study, the researchers investigated the relationship between problem gambling and family violence. The researchers identified the rates of family and intimate partner violence among problem gamblers who were seeking treatment. They also investigated the factors that might influence the link between family violence and problem gambling.

What the researchers did

The researchers used data previously collected for a large-scale study. The study investigated the prevalence of gamblers dealing with problem gambling and family violence at the same time. It had two phases. In Phase 1, participants completed a survey that assessed the likelihood that they were a victim or perpetrator of family violence, and the types

What you need to know

This study aimed to investigate how problem gambling and family violence are related and factors that affect this relationship. Participants were 212 gamblers seeking treatment in Australia. Over half of the participants experienced some form of family violence, including intimate partner violence. Many of these participants were both a victim and perpetrator of violence. The most common types of violence were verbal in nature. But physical violence was also reported by some participants. Many participants believed their gambling problems came before the violent behaviour. A few victims of intimate partner violence said they gambled to escape the violence and stress at home. This study could be used to inform prevention and treatment programs for problem gambling and family violence.

of violence they experienced. The four types of violence were physical harm, insults or being talked down to, threatening with harm, and screaming at.

In Phase 2, participants took part in interviews that explored the relationship between problem gambling and family violence. Participants discussed whether they thought problem gambling or family violence happened first and how the two behaviours were related. For this study, the researchers focused on 212 gamblers from three states in Australia.

What the researchers found

Over half of the participants reported being involved in family or intimate partner violence of some form. About one in three participants reported dealing with

family violence specifically. Many of these participants identified themselves as both a victim and a perpetrator of violence. Perpetrators of family violence were more likely to be older, be born in Australia, and not be in a relationship. Similarly, about one in three participants reported dealing with intimate partner violence specifically. Almost everyone in this group identified themselves as both a victim and a perpetrator. A small percentage of participants (14%) reported both family and intimate partner violence. Males and females were just as likely to be victims and perpetrators of violence.

The most common types of violence participants reported were verbal in nature (e.g., insulting or talking down to, screaming or swearing at). Physical violence was the least common, but was reported by some dealing with intimate partner violence.

Most participants said they were a victim of or a perpetrator against one family member. However, over a quarter of participants said they were victims of more than one family member. Nearly a quarter of participants said they had been violent towards more than one family member. Current partners were most likely to victims, followed by parents and children. Current partners were also most likely to be perpetrators of violence.

Many participants thought gambling was related to family and intimate partner violence. Many also thought that gambling problems came before the violent behavior. But a few victims of intimate partner violence said they gambled to escape from the violence and stress at home.

How you can use this research

Gambling treatment providers could use this research to support gamblers on how to maintain positive relationships with their family and minimize conflict. Specifically, treatment providers could offer family or couple therapy to help heal relationships. More research is needed to better understand how family violence occurs in the context of problem gambling. Studies could also focus on at-risk populations such as indigenous populations and people who also suffer from mental health issues.

About the researchers

Aino Suomi, **Nick A. Dowling**, and **Alun C. Jackson** are with Melbourne Graduate School of Education at the University of Melbourne in Australia. **Shane Thomas** is with the Centre for Research on Ageing Health & Wellbeing at the Australian National University in Australia. **Max Abbott** is with the Faculty of Health and Environmental Sciences at Auckland University of Technology in New Zealand. **Maria Bellringer** is with the Gambling and Addictions Research Centre at Auckland University of Technology. **Malcolm Battersby** is with the Flinders Human Behaviour and Health Research Unit at Flinders University in Australia. **Jane Koziol-McLain** is with the Auckland University of Technology. **Tiffany Lavis** is with Flinders University. For more information about this study, please contact Aino Suomi at aino.suomi@acu.edu.au.

Citation

Suomi, A., Dowling, N. A., Thomas, S., Abbott, M., Bellringer, M., Battersby, M, ... Jackson, A. C. (2018). Patterns of family and intimate partner violence in problem gamblers. *Journal of Gambling Studies*. Advance online publication <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10899-018-9768-9>

Keywords

Family violence, intimate partner violence, problem gambling, bi-directional violence, situational violence

Gambling Research Exchange Ontario (GREO)

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.

Learn more about GREO by visiting greo.ca or emailing info@greo.ca.

