

# research snapshot

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## The impact of a problem gambling prevention class on non-gambling young men

### What this research is about

Social representations are beliefs, ideas and practices that are shared by members of a society. How people who gamble problematically are represented can influence how they are viewed and approached by others. If there are negative representations, people may maintain their social distance. This could lead to more stigmas and less social support provided for people who gamble problematically.

Prevention programs to raise awareness of problem gambling target the general population. This includes people who do not gamble, those who gamble recreationally, and those who gamble problematically. Several studies had examined the impact of such programs on people's views. However, the results had been mixed. For instance, one study reported that students who saw a video of the consequences of problem gambling reduced their negative views of people with a gambling problem. In contrast, another study reported that attending a multi-lesson prevention program led to even more negative views.

In this study, the researchers examined the impact of a problem gambling prevention class on young men who have never gambled. They explored if attending the class might lead to different representations of people with a gambling problem.

### What the researchers did

Participants were 545 young men between the ages of 18 to 25 and self-reported to have never gambled. They were all conscripts attending a two-day military recruitment program in Lausanne, Switzerland. On day one, they were assigned to different groups by the recruitment authority according to the program's daily schedules and activities. Some groups attended

### What you need to know

This study looked at the impact of a problem gambling prevention class on young men who have never gambled. All participants were conscripts attending a two-day military recruitment program in Switzerland. The results showed that participants had negative representations of people who gamble problematically, regardless if they attended the prevention class or not. People who gamble problematically were mainly represented as being mentally disordered and self-centred. Participants who attended the class were even more negative than those who did not attend the class. These results suggest that problem gambling prevention programs need to consider who they are targeting. Programs may have an unintended and opposite effect on non-gamblers, such as increasing their negative views.

a problem gambling prevention class on that day, while others did not. About one-third of participants did not attend the prevention class.

The purpose of the prevention class was to educate the conscripts about the risks of problem gambling. The class lasted about 40 minutes, during which the trainer provided information about the consequences of problem gambling for gamblers and people close to them. The list of consequences included specific traits and behaviours of people who gamble problematically, such as losing control, being depressed and anxious, and lying to conceal gambling. A short video was shown about a group of young people engaging in gambling and eventually

developing an addiction. After the video, a short discussion was held. The trainer also handed out information about problem gambling help centers, websites, and helpline. There was no information or discussion on people's representations of those who gamble problematically.

On day two, the conscripts completed a short evaluation form for the recruitment program. Participants were also invited to complete a survey for the study. On the survey, they provided their sociodemographic information (i.e., age, past-year occupation, canton of residence) and their reasons for not gambling. They rated the extent to which they agreed with 10 distinct traits about people who gamble problematically (e.g., being impulsive versus being considered). Their responses were used to assess their social representations of people who gamble problematically.

#### What the researchers found

People who gamble problematically were mainly represented as being mentally disordered and self-centred. Mentally disordered implied being tense, depressed, impulsive, ill, and unmindful. Self-centred implied being stingy, immoral, and selfish. The negative representations were endorsed by both participants who attended the prevention class and those who did not.

Participants who attended the class were even more negative in their representations than those who did not attend the class. Also, the more participants regarded people who gamble problematically as mentally disordered, the more they saw them as self-centred.

#### How you can use this research

The results suggest that prevention programs need to consider who they are targeting. The same information may have different effects on people who do not gamble, people who gamble, and people who gamble problematically. It is possible that a standard program to raise awareness of problem gambling may have an unintended and opposite effect. Importantly, it could lead to even more negative views of people who have a gambling problem among non-gamblers.

Future research could examine if the social representations of people who gamble problematically differ for people with different gambling risk levels. Future research could also examine the effects of specific contents of prevention programs.

#### About the researchers

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