Exploring the understanding and uptake of responsible gambling practices among people living in Macao

What this research is about

Macao is a region in China that is well-known for being a center for gambling. Since gambling is a big part of Chinese culture, people living in Macao may have a higher chance of developing gambling disorder than people in other countries. Gambling disorder is when an individual is addicted to gambling and experiences negative consequences from gambling.

Responsible gambling refers to strategies to protect people from gambling-related harms. Strategies can include setting time and money limits on gambling. The Macao government started a responsible gambling campaign in 2009. The number of people in Macao with gambling disorder had dropped in 2013 and 2014. But only a small number of problem gamblers were seeking treatment. The low rate help seeking suggested that the campaign might not be as effective as one might envision.

The researchers did two studies. In Study 1, they investigated the extent to which gamblers in Macao adopted responsible gambling strategies. They also explored if gambling disorder symptoms affected whether people used responsible gambling strategies. In Study 2, the researchers explored Macao residents’ understanding of responsible gambling and their opinions of responsible gambling policies.

What the researchers did

In study 1, the researchers randomly selected 1020 adults by telephone to participate in a survey. The survey collected participants’ demographic information and asked about their gambling experience. Participants who had gambled within the last year answered questions about their use of responsible gambling strategies. Participants were also assessed for symptoms of gambling disorder. They answered questions about whether or not they thought information about gambling treatment was easily available to them.

In Study 2, the researchers ran four focus group discussions. They recruited participants using an advertisement in a local newspaper. Participants were 25 adults who were a mix of casino employees and people who did not work in casinos. Participants also completed a questionnaire that captured their demographic information and gambling experience, and assessed them for gambling disorder symptoms.

What you need to know

The Macao government started a campaign in 2009 to promote responsible gambling. In Study 1, the researchers investigated the extent to which gamblers in Macao were using responsible gambling strategies. The results showed that a fair number of gamblers did not use responsible gambling strategies. Gamblers with more severe symptoms of gambling disorder were less likely to use those strategies. In Study 2, the researchers explored Macao residents’ understanding and opinions of responsible gambling strategies. All participants were aware of responsible gambling, but their knowledge was limited. Many participants doubted that responsible gambling strategies were effective. These findings suggest that the Macao government needs to do more to support gamblers in using responsible gambling strategies. The government could also address factors, such as culture and people’s motivation, to improve responsible gambling uptake.
What the researchers found

In Study 1, 284 participants were recent gamblers who had gambled in the past year. Many of those gamblers adopted some positive responsible gambling strategies. The majority of gamblers set a limit on how much money to spend on gambling. But a fair number of gamblers did not set a time limit or would bet on a game they did not know well. Also, many gamblers still made negative gambling practices, like borrowing money for gambling.

The researchers found a relationship between gambling disorder and responsible gambling. Specifically, the more symptoms of gambling disorder a person had, the less likely they were to use responsible gambling strategies. Compared to non-gamblers, gamblers were more likely to be unaware of promotion channels for gambling treatment services. There were no differences between non-gamblers and gamblers about the ease of accessing gambling treatment services.

In Study 2, the researchers found that participants thought gambling for fun was socially acceptable, but too much gambling was irresponsible. Participants held negative opinions of people with gambling disorder. They thought that disordered gamblers were personally responsible for their problems. All participants were aware of responsible gambling, but they generally considered it to be ineffective. Few participants understood responsible gambling procedures and policies. This lack of knowledge and low confidence might prevent them from using responsible gambling strategies.

Participants who worked in a casino thought the government’s strategies to promote responsible gambling were unsuccessful. They doubted that gambling operators would be active in promoting responsible gambling strategies. A few of the casino employees had received training on responsible gambling, but thought it was insufficient and superficial. These results suggest that the Macao government needs to address many different factors, such as culture and people’s motivation, to improve responsible gambling uptake.

How you can use this research

Treatment providers could use this research to develop strategies that encourage gamblers to seek help for gambling disorder. This research could also help the Macao government to improve the uptake of responsible gambling strategies. More research is needed to understand whether responsible gambling strategies protect gamblers from gambling disorder.

About the researchers

Kwok-Kit Tong, Caren M. W. Lei, and Anise M. S. Wu are affiliated with the Department of Psychology at the University of Macau in Macao, China. Eva P. W. Hung is affiliated with the Department of Social Science at Hang Seng Management College in Hong Kong, China. For more information about this study, please contact Anise M. S. Wu at anisewu@umac.mo.

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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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