

research snapshot

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Family gambling problems negatively affect Australians' physical and mental health

What this research is about

People who gamble a lot may develop problem gambling (PG). PG is repetitive gambling behaviour that leads to negative consequences such as relationship and money problems. People with other issues like alcohol and drug problems are more likely to develop PG. Gambling problems often affect people close to the PG as well. A family gambling problem (FGP) is when family or household members are all feeling stress related to gambling.

People with a FGP may be dealing with their own gambling problem, another person's gambling problem, or both. They may be experiencing many types of stress which can make their life more difficult. People with a FGP often lack effective coping skills, communication skills, and problem-solving skills. Stress that is created from within the family because of poor coping strategies is called endogenous stress. Endogenous stressors include alcohol abuse, drug problems, and breaking the law. Stress that comes from outside the family is called exogenous stress. Exogenous stressors include a serious accident, illness, losing a job, or a family member dying. Family members may develop physical and mental health problems from both types of stress.

Some studies suggest that people with a FPG have poorer health compared to people without a FPG. People with a FPG are more likely to have other addiction problems and suffer from mental health disorders such as anxiety. People with PG are often younger in age, men, single, and have less education. Their family members may have similar characteristics. In this study, the researchers explored the demographic and health characteristics of people

What you need to know

In this study, the researchers explored the types of stressors and health problems that people with family gambling problems (FGPs) have. The researchers analyzed survey responses from 15,475 Australian adults who were 18 years of age and older. About 1.7% reported a FGP. Australians with a FGP were more likely to have money problems than those without a FGP. FGPs negatively affected physical and mental health. Many Australians with a FGP also had other serious stressors in their lives such as drug problems, trouble with police, and experiences of violence. Treatment service providers could use this research to create programs that help families deal with their FGPs.

with a FGP. They also explored the types of stressors that people with a FGP deal with and how these stressors affect their physical and mental health.

What the researchers did

The researchers analyzed data from the National Health Survey 2011–2013. The National Health Survey collected information about Australians' health between March 2011 and June 2012.

The survey collected participants' sociodemographic characteristics such as their age, gender, income amount, and education. It assessed whether they had stress around money by asking them if their household could raise \$2,000 within a week to pay for something important. The survey assessed how disadvantaged participants were using the Index of Relative Socioeconomic Disadvantage. This index

summarizes the socioeconomic conditions of people living in an area. In a disadvantaged area, people tend to make less money, have less education, and often work in jobs that do not require a lot of skill.

The survey assessed participants' health by asking them how good they thought their health was. It asked them if they smoked and drank alcohol. The Kessler Psychological Distress Scale-10 was used to assess participants' mental health. The survey also asked participants if they or their family had experienced 13 different types of endogenous and exogenous stressors in the last year. The researchers analyzed data from 15,475 Australian adults who were 18 years of age and older.

What the researchers found

About 1.7% of participants reported a FGP. People with a FGP were more likely to be younger in age, have no job, and have stress about money than people without a FGP. However, they were more likely to have a post-school qualification (e.g., trade certificate). Their household incomes were similar to people without a FGP. In addition, they were not more likely to be living in a disadvantaged area. These findings suggest that families with FGPs are more likely to have money problems because of gambling.

People with a FGP rated their physical and mental health as being worse than people without a FGP. They were also more likely to have a diagnosed mental health disorder and to take medication for mental health. They were more likely to smoke every day. These results suggest that FGPs negatively affect Australians' physical and mental health.

People with a FGP had more stressors in their life than people without a FGP. They were eight times more likely to have endogenous stressors such as drug problems, trouble with police, and violent experiences. These findings suggest that people with a FGP also have other serious stressors in their lives. They may lack the skills they need to cope with their stressors and use unhelpful ways of coping (e.g., gambling, drug use). As a result, they may suffer more stressors and more serious health problems.

How you can use this research

This research could inform treatment service providers and researchers. Treatment service providers could create programs that help families deal with their FGPs. Researchers could explore whether family members' health is affected differently depending on how close their relationship is with the person with PG.

About the researchers

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Citation

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About Gambling Research Exchange (GREO)

Gambling Research Exchange (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 safer 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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