

research snapshot

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The impact of parental gambling problems on the health and wellbeing of children

What this research is about

Gambling-related harms can impact children living with parents experiencing a gambling problem. These harms affect many areas of the children's lives, such as financial problems, relationship difficulties between parents and between parents and children. Also, gambling-related harms are linked to decreased health and wellbeing. One study reported that children whose parents experience problem gambling typically have a poorer "quality of youth" than others.

This study examined the impacts of parental gambling problems on the health and wellbeing of children. Specifically, the study explored whether harms to the health and wellbeing of children increase with more severe parental problem gambling.

What the researchers did

The researchers used data from Growing up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC). LSAC participants were recruited through random selection from the larger population. The LSAC follows two large representative samples (cohorts) of Australian children.

The researchers used wave 7 data from the LSAC that were collected in 2016. A total of 3,695 children across both cohorts were included in this study. At the time of data collection, participants in the first cohort (Cohort B) were around 12 years and participants in the second cohort (Cohort K) were around 16 years. Across both cohorts, 49% of respondents were female. On average, their parents were 44 years of age (cohort B) and 48 years of age (cohort K). About half of the parents had at least an advanced diploma. On average, the parents had a weekly household income of \$2490 (cohort B) and \$2737 (cohort K).

What you need to know

Gambling-related harms can impact children living with parents experiencing a gambling problem. This study examined the impacts of parental gambling problems on the health and wellbeing of children. Specifically, the study explored whether harms to the health and wellbeing of children increase with more severe parental problem gambling. The researchers analyzed data from Growing up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children. The analysis examined responses from a total of 3,695 children across two cohorts aged 12 and 16 years. Around 49% of children were female. The researchers found that children whose parent(s) had some level of gambling problems had poorer health, more anxiety and/or lower mood symptoms, and more behavioural and emotional problems.

Parental gambling problems were measured by the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI). The PGSI was answered by the parents. Child health and wellbeing was measured using the following:

- (1) Child Health Utility 9D (CHU9D), which measured health-related quality of life;
- (2) Spence Anxiety Scale, which measured anxiety symptoms;
- (3) Short Mood & Feelings Questionnaire, which measured depressed feelings;
- (4) Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), which measured behavioural and emotional problems;
- (5) Self-harm and suicide intentions were assessed in the older cohort;

(6) Happiness was assessed with the question “in general, I am happy with how things are for me in my life right now.”

Parents of the younger cohort were asked about their children’s sports participation. The older cohort answered about their sports participation themselves. Finally, socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of the household were assessed (e.g., household income, parents’ ages, parents’ education).

What the researchers found

More than 10% of Australian children were living in households with adults experiencing some level of gambling problems. Of note, 1.2% of children were living in households with adults experiencing severe gambling problems. Households where gambling problems were present tended to have younger and less well-educated parents. These households also had lower incomes and were more likely to be in areas of greater disadvantage. The researchers did not find a relationship between sports participation and parental problem gambling severity.

Children whose parent(s) had some level of gambling problems had poorer health, more anxiety and/or lower mood symptoms, and more behavioural and emotional problems. As the parent’s gambling problems increased, children experienced more anxiety and feelings of low mood. Children also experienced increased behavioural difficulties (e.g., conduct problems, hyperactivity, peer problems).

The younger cohort reported lower happiness when their parent(s) had more severe gambling problems. The older cohort had more self-harm thoughts and behaviours when their parents had more severe gambling problems.

How you can use this research

Policy makers and educators can use this research to ensure that appropriate information and support is being provided to children whose parents have some level of problem gambling severity. Practitioners can also use these findings to increase parental awareness of how their own gambling can affect their children.

About the researchers

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Citation

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