

research snapshot

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Risk factors associated with preadolescent gambling in Italy

What this research is about

It has been reported that young people engage in gambling, even though it is illegal for them to do so. The prevalence rate for youth gambling is quite high. This can be seen in Italy too. Youth engagement with gambling may be due to broader social factors, such as increased popularity and acceptance of gambling. Other risk factors may be found in the immediate social context around the individual. These ecological factors may include friends and family. Past studies have noted a relationship between having family members or friends who gambled and one's own gambling behaviour.

Some studies have shown that some adolescents may show risk factors for future pathological gambling. However, much remains unknown about preadolescents. In particular, do they also show the same risk factors? The objectives of this study were to identify whether preadolescents gamble and to what extent. The authors were interested in examining whether preadolescent gamblers show the same characteristics as adolescents and adults. They also wanted to address any commonalities or differences in the perception of game between those who gamble and those who do not.

What the researchers did

The researchers recruited 2,475 preadolescents aged 11 to 14 from 47 schools in Italy. The participants completed a self-report survey about their gambling engagement. The survey asked whether they had gambled with money in the past year. The researchers defined "gamblers" as those who reported that they gambled with money. The survey also asked participants about their engagement with various

What you need to know

Young people engage in gambling and may show the same risk factors that adults show. Many studies have examined the adolescent population, but none have investigated gambling in preadolescents. The researchers recruited 2475 youth aged 11-14 from schools in Italy. The results revealed that those who gambled showed false perceptions about gambling, had more inappropriate school behaviour, and experienced higher conflict with their parents about their video gaming. Moreover, those who gambled were more likely to be male, older, and have parents who gambled. Overall, these risk factors are similar to those reported in adolescents and adults.

games. These included video poker, slot machine/video slot, lotto, lottery, super jackpot, scratch card, sport bets, and daily fantasy sports.

In addition to gambling, the participants filled out questions related to their gender, inappropriate school behaviour, whether they had a parent with gambling behaviour, and whether they had troubles with a parent related to their gambling and video game use.

What the researchers found

The researchers found that in comparison to youth who did not gamble, youth who did were more likely to be male and to be older. Moreover, those who gambled had more inappropriate school behaviours, had parents who gambled, and had more conflict with their family related to their video game or gambling habits.

Those who gambled and those who did not varied in their perceptions of game. For instance, results revealed that those who gambled saw gambling as “less risky” and perceived less risk in losing money through playing. They also held the perception of becoming rich from gambling and saw it as more exciting and fun.

Among those who gambled, some games were more preferred than others. Results revealed that gamblers preferred video poker and slot machine/video slot to all other games, except for lotto, lottery, and super jackpot. They preferred lotto/lottery/super jackpot to scratch cards. They played more sport bets and daily fantasy sports than scratch cards.

The researchers found that six factors acted as risk factors for gambling engagement. These included gender, inappropriate school behaviour, parents with gambling behaviour, troubles with parents due to playing video games, online gambling without money, and age. Specifically, boys were more likely than girls to become engaged with gambling. Also, those who were older were more likely to engage in gambling. Those with more problematic school behaviours, parents who gambled, and those who had troubles with parents related to their videogame use were more likely to gamble. Even those who gambled online without money were more likely to engage in gambling.

Overall, these findings are in line with previous literature that examined adolescents and adults. The preadolescents in this study showed similar risk factors as those reported in older age groups.

How you can use this research

This research could be used by program providers, clinicians, and other researchers. Service providers could examine the risk factors in preadolescents to establish structured and effective preventions. Clinicians could incorporate family therapy to minimize conflict and address school issues. Researchers could develop a screening tool for gambling in this young population. Future studies could further investigate why young people gamble and their consequences from gambling.

About the researchers

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Citation

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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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