

research snapshot

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Examining gambling subtypes and gender differences in a population-based study

What this research is about

Gambling is a gendered activity. Past research shows that men and women start gambling at different ages and for different reasons. They may engage with and prefer different forms of gambling. However, the majority of research is focused on men with problem gambling, even though women make up one-third of people with problem gambling. Also, past research is largely based on people seeking treatment, despite treatment seekers constituting a very small minority of people experiencing problem gambling. Most of the studies also focus on people who are clinically diagnosed with problem gambling, without studying the various subtypes of gamblers such as recreational or at-risk gamblers.

For these reasons, this study seeks to fill in some research gaps related to gender and gambling. Specifically, this research uses a sample of a population to comprehensively understand gambling subtype behaviours and how they differ by gender.

What the researchers did

The researchers used data from the Baseline General Population Survey of Massachusetts conducted in 2013-2014. This study was the most recent study to measure gambling and problem gambling among adult residents in Massachusetts. In total, there were 9,523 participants who reported their gambling behaviours.

In that survey, participants were first asked how frequently they engaged in 10 types of gambling. Those who gambled at least once a month completed the Problem and Pathological Gambling Measure (PPGM), which was used to assess gambling behaviours. The survey also contained questions

What you need to know

This study examined gambling behaviours by subtype and gender. The researchers analyzed data from the Baseline General Population Survey of Massachusetts. There were 9,523 participants in total. Results revealed few differences between men and women with regard to gambling. For instance, having friends and family who regularly gamble and gambling at casinos predicted at-risk and problem/pathological gambling for both men and women. However, women at-risk gamblers were more likely to play bingo and have anxiety/depression, but men were more likely to gamble “to feel good” about themselves. Women with problem/pathological gambling were more likely to have problems with drugs or alcohol in the past year, while men were more likely to have an unhappier childhood, gamble online, and identify as Hispanic.

about demographics, recreation, physical and mental health, and alcohol and drug use. With respect to gambling, it asked participants about their motivations for gambling, awareness of services related to problem gambling, and importance of gambling as a recreational activity.

The researchers explored differences between genders and across subtypes of gamblers. For both genders, they compared between recreational and non-gamblers, recreational and at-risk gamblers, and recreational gamblers and people with problem/pathological gambling.

What the researchers found

The results revealed that men and women non-gamblers were quite similar. For instance, for both genders, the two strongest predictors for being non-gamblers were having less friends and family involved in gambling and not having consumed alcohol in the last month.

Men and women also had similar factors that predicted being at-risk gamblers. The two strongest predictors were having more friends and family who are regularly involved in gambling and engaging in casino gambling. However, there were two factors that predicted at-risk gambling in women and not in men. These were gambling on bingo and having mental health problems (anxiety and/or depression). Men and women who were at-risk gamblers also had similar motives for gambling. Both genders gambled to win money, for excitement/entertainment, to escape, and/or for distraction. For men only, gambling to feel good about themselves was a predictor for at-risk gambling.

With respect to problem/pathological gambling, men and women again displayed some similarities. These included having friends and family who regularly gamble, gambling at casinos, and having problems with other behavioural addictions. Also, non-US born people were more likely to be non-gamblers and have gambling problems. This result suggested that non-US born men and women were less likely to gamble but when they did, they usually experienced more problems.

Despite the similarities, one predictor for problem/pathological gambling in women was having problems with drugs or alcohol in the last year. This was not observed in men. Likewise, there were a few factors that predicted problem/pathological gambling in men but not women. These were having an unhappier childhood, gambling online, and identifying as Hispanic.

How you can use this research

This research could be used by service providers and clinicians. Prevention and treatment plans could be targeted for each gender and subtype to reduce

gambling related harms. Future research could continue to monitor factors that are related to gambling and how they differ by subtype and gender. Further studies could replicate this study with other populations and see whether the results are comparable in men and women.

About the researchers

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