A review of recent research on the treatment of disordered gambling

What this research is about
Gambling disorder has recently been considered an addictive behaviour, rather than an impulse control disorder. Several treatment options are available at present. These include drug therapies and cognitive-behavioural therapies that focus on changing how people think about gambling and cope with gambling urges. There is also the potential to combine different types of treatments. The authors provided a review of the latest research in the past 3 years since 2012 on the treatment of disordered gambling. They also evaluated the strengths and weaknesses of research evidence for each treatment.

What the researcher did
The researcher provided a review of research studies that had been published in the last 3 years since 2012 on the treatment of disordered gambling. Their review evaluated recent developments and considered the strengths and weaknesses of various treatment options.

What the researcher found
Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) aims to change how patients think about gambling and cope with gambling urges. CBT has the strongest evidence as a treatment for disorder gambling. It has been found to be able to reduce gambling symptoms and associated behaviours, such as frequency of gambling and amount of money spent on gambling. CBT has been offered along with other interventions, such as mindfulness and meditation. Adding mindfulness intervention with CBT may improve treatment outcomes. There is an emphasis in research on tailoring CBT to the needs of specific groups. But evidence for tailoring CBT is mixed.

Brief treatments, such as motivational interviewing, are becoming more popular. Motivational interviewing helps patients explore how they feel about gambling and motivate them to make changes. Other types of brief treatment include providing personalized feedback to patients about their gambling habits. Brief treatments are cost effective and require less time and resources in comparison to other treatments. Some studies have shown that brief treatments
can be effective in reducing problematic gambling. However, research is still lacking on their long-term effects.

Drug treatments have limited evidence as an effective treatment for disorder gambling. The most supported drug therapy is opioid antagonists. More studies with larger samples and rigorous control groups are needed. It may be beneficial to combine drug treatment with psychosocial treatment, such as CBT or motivational interviewing.

Web-based interventions are on the rise in recent years. They may offer an easy access to treatment through the internet, particularly for people who are reluctant to seek help in a clinic. Only a small number of studies have evaluated the potential of web-based treatments for disordered gambling. Positive results have been found and this new type of treatment shows promise.

Many other treatment approaches have not been examined adequately. In past research, family-based treatments, voluntary self-exclusion, and Gamblers Anonymous have been reported to have positive results. However, they remain under-studied in recent years.

How you can use this research

This review can benefit practitioners or counsellors who work with problematic gamblers. Treatment providers can benefit from knowing what type of treatment has more empirical support. For example, it would be beneficial to know the basis for choosing one treatment over another. This information would also be valuable to researchers. Comparison of patients who drop out of a treatment with those who stay is also lacking at present. In addition, future studies need to be more transparent about their sampling methods and how they minimize bias. They should evaluate the effects of treatment approaches that are still understudied (e.g., family-based treatments, self-exclusion, Gamblers Anonymous).

About the Researcher

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Citation


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Disordered gambling, treatment, review, gambling, evidence-based, pathological gambling

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