The Effects of Treatment Support for Family Members on Older Adult Gamblers: A Rapid Evidence Assessment

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“How might the provision of treatment support to family members affect recovery in older adult problem gamblers?”

Consequences of problem gambling (PG) in this age group include:

- inability to replace lost money5 due to fixed, modest monthly income4
- psychological concerns (e.g., substance abuse, depression, anxiety)5
- social concerns (e.g., family/social difficulties)5

Involving family members in psychological treatment has shown evidence of positive impact on treatment outcomes, family functioning, and individual functioning among younger problem gamblers5 and may prove particularly powerful among older adult problem gamblers, who frequently report feelings of isolation.

A Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) was conducted to review the literature within a limited time frame, that did not lend itself to a systematic review.7 Since this area is understudied, the search was expanded to include substance abuse and addictions resources and to generalize the findings to the PG realm.

The current REA sought to:

1) draw attention to an underrepresented subset of the gambling population;
2) demonstrate the potential impact of helping older adults indirectly through the treatment of their loved ones;
3) provide guidance on how to involve family members in the treatment of older adult gamblers.

This study provides a launching point for practitioners, family members and researchers working with older adult problem gamblers in providing them with best evidence to be successful in treatment.

Findings

The Effects of Treatment Support of Family Members on Adult Gamblers

21/23 studies in the REA showed that involving family members in the treatment of problem gamblers can lead to positive outcomes for problem gamblers, including decreased gambling frequency and severity of gambling consequences.

The Effects of Treatment Support of Family Members on Older Adult Substance Abusers

7/10 studies stressed the importance of involving family in the treatment of older adults dealing with substance abuse issues. However, none of these studies evaluated the effectiveness of involving family members in treatment.

The Effects of Treatment Support of Family Members on Adult Substance Abusers

19 studies reported that behavioural couples therapy can lead to increased readiness for change, decreased frequency of substance abuse, lower relapse rates, and increased relationship satisfaction.

10 studies found that patient-engaged substance abuse interventions [i.e. CRAFT: A Relational Intervention Sequence for Engagement (ARISE)] were effective in increasing treatment engagement and retention and decreasing substance use.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THREE AUDIENCES

Practitioners:

Adopt a family-oriented approach in the treatment of older adult problem gamblers by actively involving family members in treatment.

Such approaches have been linked to positive outcomes for both the problem gambler and the family members including:

- decreased gambling frequency
- less $ spent on gambling
- decreased severity of gambling consequences
- decreased gambling urges
- increased treatment attendance and abstinence among adult problem gamblers

Family members:

Support treatment initiation, engagement, and adherence

- Strengthen the older adult’s social support network
- Increase the problem gambler’s capacity for change

Researchers:

More research on older adult problem gamblers is needed. Potential research areas include:

- Efficacy studies of PG treatments for older adults
- Mechanisms of efficacious treatment modalities
- Replication of the effectiveness of substance use treatments on older adult problem gamblers

ABOUT THE PROJECT

The Peel Addiction Assessment and Referral Centre (PAARC) is a non-profit community-based organization which provides services to a diverse population to reduce the harm associated with substance abuse and problem gambling. PAARC offers assessments, case management and supportive counselling for persons aged 55 and older, in the comfort of their homes or place of residence. This program is designed for older people who need help for substance misuse or abuse, or harmful gambling, and who have mobility or other complex problems.

Gambling Research Exchange Ontario (GREO) works to support evidence-informed decision making about gambling and its potential harm. This REA was conducted for the PAARC as part of GREO’s Evidence Exchange program which aims to provide organizations with the best evidence to inform decisions in a timely manner.

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Inclusion Criteria

Quantitative & qualitative research

Older adults (age 55+) and adult (age 21-64) samples

Research examining problem gamblers/substance use outcomes

Published from 1990 to present

Published prior to 1990

English language

Non-English language

Exclusion Criteria

Descriptive research

Child and adolescent samples

Research examining family member outcomes

5,104 electronic articles and book chapters were screened across three databases (Psycinfo, Google Scholar, PubMed). After title and abstract screening, 64 papers were used as the evidence base for the REA.

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POSTER REFERENCES

21 PG resources

(1 older adult sample, 20 adult samples)

43 Substance Abuse resources

(7 older adult samples, 36 adult samples)

5,019 records excluded after abstract sifting

23 resources excluded due to not meeting inclusion criteria

5,104 electronic articles and book chapters assessed for full eligibility

64 electronic articles and book chapters that met inclusion criteria

5,104 electronic articles and book chapters from specific searches of 3 databases screened

- Psycinfo (n = 4243)
- Google Scholar (n = 700)
- PubMed (n = 161)

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