

research snapshot

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Identifying different types of gamblers based on their inaccurate thoughts about gambling and impulsive traits

What this research is about

Problem gambling (PG) is when a person has repetitive gambling behaviour that leads to negative consequences. People with PG can also have different comorbidities. Comorbidities are other illnesses people have at the same time as their main illness.

The Pathways Model describes three types of gamblers based on certain traits and comorbidities. Type 1 is called 'behaviourally conditioned problem gambler'. People in this group start gambling to have fun and be social. They have cognitive distortions that can make their gambling behaviour worse. Cognitive distortions are inaccurate thoughts about gambling, such as believing one can control gambling outcomes. Type 2 is called 'emotionally vulnerable problem gambler'. People in this group gamble to cope with stress and anxiety. Type 3 is called 'antisocial-impulsivist problem gambler'. People in this group are very impulsive and have low self-control. They are also the most difficult to treat.

No studies have classified gamblers based on both gambling cognitions and impulsive traits. In this study, the researchers identified different types of gamblers based on their gambling cognitions and impulsive traits. They considered the Pathways Model when identifying the different types of gamblers.

What the researchers did

The researchers used advertisements on social media and research networks to recruit gamblers in the community. They also recruited gamblers who were seeking treatment from specialized programs in France and the United Kingdom. Participants were 709 adult gamblers who lived in the community and 122 adult gamblers who were being treated for PG.

What you need to know

In this study, the researchers identified different types of gamblers based on their cognitive distortions and impulsive traits. They considered the Pathways Model when identifying the types of gamblers. The researchers recruited 709 adult gamblers from the community and 122 adult gamblers who were being treated for problem gambling. Participants completed a survey with several questionnaires. The researchers identified five types of gamblers. Three of these types had similar characteristics to the ones in the Pathways Model. The other two types were: (1) impulsive gamblers without cognitive distortions, and (2) gamblers without impulsive traits or cognitive distortions. Treatment service providers could use this research to develop treatments that are more targeted to gamblers' characteristics.

Gamblers from the community completed an online survey. The survey asked for their demographic information such as age and sex. It asked which type of gambling games they preferred and how often they gambled. Participants also completed three questionnaires. The short UPPS-P Impulsive Behaviour Scale assessed their impulsive traits. The Gambling-Related Cognitions Scale (GRCS) assessed whether participants had gambling cognitions. The Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI) assessed participants for PG. There were 400 gamblers from the community who also completed the short Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS-21). Gamblers being treated for PG completed a similar paper-and-pencil survey before their treatment began.

What the researchers found

The researchers identified five types of gamblers.

- Gamblers in the Type 1 category had few gambling cognitions and impulsive traits. They were at low risk of PG and had low distress. These gamblers preferred chance-based games such as the lottery.
- Gamblers in the Type 2 category had many gambling cognitions related to their ability to control and predict gambling outcomes, but few impulsive traits. They liked playing games of skill. They had moderate risk of PG and low distress.
- Type 3 gamblers had few gambling cognitions but many impulsive traits. They had moderate risk of PG. The Pathways Model suggests that all people with PG have gambling cognitions. But results for Type 3 gamblers suggest that some people at risk of PG do not have gambling cognitions.
- Type 4 gamblers had many gambling cognitions about gambling being able to raise their moods and thinking that they could not control their gambling. They also had many impulsive traits and high distress. This group likely had PG. This group also had the highest percentage of gamblers in treatment for PG.
- Type 5 gamblers had the most gambling cognitions and impulsive traits compared to the other types. This group had the second highest percentage of gamblers in treatment. Type 5 gamblers likely had PG.

Type 2, 4, and 5 gamblers in this study had similar characteristics to the three types of gamblers in the Pathways Model. Type 1 and 3 gamblers are new types that the researchers identified.

How you can use this research

Treatment service providers could use this research to screen people with PG for different levels of cognitive distortions and impulsive traits. They could also use this research to develop treatments that are more targeted to the characteristics of their clients.

About the researchers

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Citation

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About Gambling Research Exchange (GREO)

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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