

research snapshot

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Identifying characteristics that may increase teenagers' risk of problem gambling

What this research is about

Problem gambling is repetitive gambling behaviour that leads to negative consequences. These consequences include poor mental health, relationship problems, and money problems. Gambling is illegal for children and young teenagers. However, many teenagers find ways to gamble. It is estimated that a higher proportion of teenagers suffer from problem gambling than adults.

There are protective factors that make people less likely to gamble. Protective factors for gambling include having a good family life, good coping strategies, and positive wellbeing. There are also risk factors that make people more likely to gamble. Risk factors for gambling include drinking alcohol and using drugs, depression, and being male. The socioecological model suggests there are risk and protective factors on: 1) an individual level (e.g., personal traits); a relationship level (e.g., family and peers); and 3) a community and societal level (e.g., social and cultural norms).

In this study, the researchers explored whether teenagers' gambling behaviour is related to their sociodemographic characteristics (e.g., age, gender, living in rural or urban area), family relationships, parents' characteristics, and school performance. They also explored the relationship between problem gambling and psychological, social, and money problems.

What the researchers did

The researchers created a questionnaire. The questionnaire had four parts:

What you need to know

In this study, the researchers explored whether teenagers' gambling behaviour is related to their sociodemographic characteristics, family relationships, parents' characteristics, and school performance. They also explored the relationship between problem gambling and psychological, social, and money problems. The researchers enrolled 366 teenagers in their study. Participants completed an in-person questionnaire. Older male teenagers who performed poorly at school and had a father with less education had a higher risk of problem gambling. Researchers can use this research to explore how teenagers' family life affects their gambling behaviour.

- The first part had questions about sociodemographic characteristics (e.g., gender, age, parental education, academic success).
- The second part had questions about the quality of family life (e.g., getting along with parents, being able to ask parents for help).
- The third part had questions to determine if teenagers have risky behaviours. For example, it asked whether they smoke cigarettes and drink alcohol.
- The fourth part had questions from the Canadian Adolescent Gambling Inventory (CAGI). The CAGI assesses whether teenagers suffer from psychological consequences (e.g., feel sad or depressed for losing money), social consequences (e.g., miss sports practice and family gathering), and money problems because of gambling (e.g.,

borrow money). It also includes the Gambling Problem Severity Scale (GPSS) to assess problem gambling.

The researchers enrolled 366 teenagers in their study. The participants were 14 to 20 years old and lived in Croatia. Participants completed the researchers' questionnaire during one of their classes at school.

What the researchers found

About two in five participants said they had never gambled. Many teenagers who gambled started when they were 14, 15, or 18 years old. Participants mostly played gambling activities such as playing cards, doing dares, and playing games of skill. Some also gambled in sports betting houses and played casino games online.

Males suffered more from psychological, social, and money problems due to gambling than females. They were also more likely to report problem gambling and other risky behaviours. Older participants suffered more from psychological problems due to gambling than younger participants. They were also more likely to have problem gambling and other risky behaviours. These findings suggest that gender and age affect teenagers' gambling and risky behaviours.

Participants who performed worse at school suffered more psychological problems from gambling than participants who performed well. They were also more likely to have risky behaviours. Participants who attended a vocational school were also more likely to report risky behaviours than those who attended a gymnasium (secondary school that prepares students for higher education at a university).

Participants who lived in rural areas were more satisfied with their family life than those who lived in urban areas. However, they were more likely to report risky behaviours. Participants who lived in single-parent families were more satisfied with their family life but had more risky behaviours. However, neither place of residence nor their family structure affected their gambling behaviour.

Participants who reported more psychological, social, and money problems from gambling were more likely

to have problem gambling. Being male, performing worse in school, and having a father with a lower education were all risk factors for problem gambling.

How you can use this research

Prevention service providers can use this research to deliver gambling prevention programs to young teenagers in schools and communities. Researchers can use this research to explore how teenagers' family life affects their gambling behaviour. More research is needed to understand how successful gambling prevention programs are at protecting children and teenagers from gambling consequences.

About the researchers

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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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