



Gambling participation and motivations of older adult gamblers

What this research is about

Older adults who are over the age of 55 may gamble as a leisure activity. Compared to younger people, older adults are less likely to gamble, but they may be more vulnerable to the negative consequences of gambling. Older adults are likely to have a limited and fixed source of income. Thus, even modest over-spending on gambling could lead to serious financial issues. Further, gambling marketing efforts have targeted older adults, such as offering free bus trips from retirement homes to casinos.

It is important to understand factors that contribute to problem gambling in older adults. Problem gambling occurs when an individual continues to gamble despite negative consequences. This study focused on how different gambling activities and gambling motivations might be associated with problem gambling in a large group of Canadian older adults. All of the older adults had been to casino or racino (horse racing venue with slot machines).

What the researcher did

Older adults were approached in the gaming exit /entrance area of 1 casino and 6 racinos in Central and Southwestern Ontario. They were invited to participate in a survey and were screened to make sure they were over the age of 55. In total, 2103 older adults took part in the survey.

The survey collected socio-demographic information, including gender, age, marital status and education. It screened for problem gambling and asked about participation in various gambling activities (e.g., lottery, instant win and scratch tickets, bingo, slot machines, card games). The survey also asked about

What you need to know

This study examined which features of gambling participation were associated with problem gambling in older adults. It focused on forms of gambling and motivations. Results showed that older adults who gambled monthly or more often were more likely to be problem gamblers. Several gambling activities and motivations were associated with problem gambling. Specifically, older adults who gambled monthly on slots machines, sports, bingo, and casino table games were more likely to be problem gamblers. Going to a gambling venue to win money, to escape worries, to relieve boredom, for cheap food and drink, and because of addiction were all associated with problem gambling.

gambling motivations or reasons for going to the gambling venues.

What the researcher found

About 7.6% of the older adults were problem gamblers. Those who were older were less likely to be problem gamblers. Those who were divorced, separated, or single were more likely to be problem gamblers than those who were married. Those who were retired or self-employed were less likely to be problem gamblers than full-time workers. Those born inside Canada were less likely to be problem gamblers than those born outside of Canada.

Older adults who gambled monthly or more frequently were more likely to be problem gamblers. In particular, older adults who gambled at least monthly on slot machines, sports, bingo, and casino table games were more likely to be problem

gamblers. Several forms of gambling were not associated with problem gambling, including scratch tickets, lotteries, horse racing, and games outside the casino.

The top reasons for going to a gambling venue were for entertainment/excitement, to socialize, to win money, and to relieve boredom. Several motivations were associated with problem gambling. These included to win money, to escape worries, to relieve boredom, for cheap food and drink, and because of addiction. Interestingly, going to a gambling venue to socialize, to watch a musical show, for entertainment, and because of the safe location were associated with lower chance of problem gambling.

How you can use this research

This study could be useful to gambling intervention providers and researchers. There is a need to explore how best to reach out and deliver prevention and treatment to older adults who may be at risk or are problem gamblers. Family involvement could be critical for recovery from problem gambling and prevention of relapse. At the moment, there is a lack of research on family support in treatment and prevention among older adults.

About the Researcher

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