

# research snapshot

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## Men and women face different stigma-related barriers to seeking help for gambling problems

### What this research is about

People with gambling problems may not seek help because of felt stigma. Felt stigma is when a person feels shame and embarrassment from having a trait or engaging in a particular behaviour that is viewed as socially or morally unacceptable by others. Past research suggests that men and women differ in their willingness to seek help for problem gambling. Felt stigma may act as a barrier to help-seeking for both men and women. What is missing from past research is knowledge about the factors that cause feelings of stigma, and how these may differ by gender.

The current study explored whether felt stigma may be connected to the decisions of men and women to seek help for gambling problems. Specifically, it engaged participants to explore how felt stigma might act as a barrier to help-seeking for men and women with gambling problems. The study used concept mapping, an approach to collecting data in which participants and researchers work together to create, analyze and interpret knowledge.

### What the researchers did

Participants were 28 people who gambled, family members of people with gambling problems, and health care providers who deliver gambling treatment. 10 were male and 18 were female.

Participants completed a brainstorming activity in four groups: males who gambled, females who gambled, health care providers, and those who had family members who gambled. During the activity, participants identified their thoughts on the pleasurable aspects and negative consequences of gambling. Participants came up with a list of 416

### What you need to know

This study used concept mapping to understand male and female stigma-related barriers to help-seeking for gambling problems. Both men and women felt that the shame of financial difficulties due to gambling was a barrier to help-seeking. For men, the shame of admitting that one had an addiction and negative emotions (i.e., anxiety, loss of self-respect) were barriers to help-seeking. For women, the shame of admitting that one was seduced by the 'bells and whistles' of casinos, denying the addiction, believing in luck, and being dishonest were barriers to help-seeking.

statements across the four groups. The researchers reduced these to 73 statements by removing duplicate statements and those not relevant to the research questions.

The researchers invited the participants back for a sorting and rating activity. Nineteen participants returned for the activity. They sorted the 73 statements into piles with similar meanings and created a name for each pile. Participants also rated how much they thought that each of the 73 statements interfered with help-seeking because of felt stigma (i.e., negative impact on one's own reputation or family's reputation). Participants rated each statement on a scale from one to five. One reflected that the statement did not interfere with help-seeking. Five reflected that the statement completely interfered with help-seeking.

The data was analysed separately by gender to create concept maps for males and females, and then for

males and females together. Both men and women selected a map with six clusters to describe stigma-related barriers to help-seeking.

### What the researchers found

Men and women thought that financial difficulties created feelings of shame and acted as the most important barrier to help-seeking.

Men were concerned with the stigma related to the addictive qualities of and emotional responses to gambling. For example, men thought that having to admit (to self or others) that gambling had taken over one's life was shameful and a barrier to help-seeking. Also, men thought that feelings of anxiety and suicide, the loss of self-respect, and a sense of failure because of gambling deterred one from seeking help.

Women were more concerned about the seductive nature of the gambling environment and the belief in luck. Women thought that admitting that one was attracted to the 'bells and whistles' of casinos, their denial of the addiction, their belief in luck, and the shame of being dishonest were stigma-related barriers to help-seeking.

### How you can use this research

This study shows that public health and treatment providers need to consider the differences in how men and women experience problem gambling and associated stigma. Peer outreach and support may be helpful to both men and women who gamble. People in treatment or those who have recovered from gambling problems may encourage men and women to admit to and share their behaviours, beliefs, and feelings. This could be an important step in the journey to recovery.

### About the researchers

**Alison Baxter, Christina Salmon, Alexandra Carasco-Lee, and Flora I. Matheson** are affiliated with the Centre for Urban Health Solutions in the Li Ka Shing Knowledge Institute of St. Michael's Hospital in Ontario, Canada. Flora I. Matheson is also affiliated with the Dalla Lana School of Public Health at the University of Toronto in Ontario, Canada. **Kristen Dufresne** is affiliated with the Department of Physical

Therapy at the University of Toronto in Ontario, Canada. For more information about this study, please contact Flora I. Matheson at [mathesonf@smh.ca](mailto:mathesonf@smh.ca).

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### Keywords

Problem gambling, help-seeking, barriers, stigma, gender, concept mapping

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