

research snapshot

summarize | mobilize



Person-centred services are needed for men with problem gambling and housing instability

What this research is about

People who suffer from problem gambling have difficulty controlling how much time and money they spend on gambling activities. They often have poor relationships with family and friends, and experience legal and money troubles. Their housing situation may be unstable as they may have difficulty paying rent and live in crowded environments. Persons with problem gambling are also at higher risk for mental health problems, such as depression, alcohol and drug problems. There is not a lot of research about what prevention, screening, and treatment services should be offered to persons with problem gambling who face multiple issues. The researchers explored the health and social service experiences of men with a history of problem gambling, housing instability, and other problems (e.g., mental illness, substance use). The study also provided recommendations on how to improve services for persons with complex needs including problem gambling.

What the researcher did

The researchers recruited 30 men with a history of problem gambling, housing instability, and other mental health problems. Participants were clients at Good Shepherd Ministries (GSM) of Toronto, a multi-service agency serving low income individuals. The researchers used a community-based participatory approach. They worked with GSM and people who had lived experience of housing instability, addictions and/or mental illness. The researchers trained people with such lived experience to be peer interviewers, who then interviewed the participants. During the interviews, participants were asked to discuss their gambling experiences, reasons for gambling, issues with stigma, housing history, and factors that led to their housing

What you need to know

Persons with problem gambling are not able to control how much time and money they spend on gambling. This puts them at risk of housing instability, substance use and other mental health issues. In this study, 30 men with a history of problem gambling, housing instability, and mental health problems were interviewed. The aim was to explore their experiences with health and social services offered in Toronto, Canada. Participants spoke of the need for treatment services to be person-centred and holistic. Many described that it was important for them to feel empowered and be autonomous in their journey to recovery. They highlighted the importance of having a positive relationship with service providers, and the need for empathy, compassion and sincerity. They valued respectful communication free of judgement.

The researchers recommended that services should be provided in a “one-stop-shop” environment to address the multiple health and social concerns that persons with problem gambling might have. Raising awareness of services for problem gambling was also recommended.

instability. Participants also discussed the services that they had used to help with gambling, housing and other social and mental health issues. The participants filled out a questionnaire about their socio-demographic characteristics, drug use, depression, gambling activity and gambling problems in the past year.

What the researchers found

About three out of every four men interviewed were identified as persons with problem gambling. Many also

had symptoms of anxiety and depression. Participants expressed that it was important for services to be person-centred and holistic. They discussed the need to feel empowered and be autonomous in their journey to recovery. It was important for them to take ownership of their situation and be involved in the decision about their treatment. Thus, there was a tension between providing the necessary supports for health and social well-being, while also respecting autonomy.

Participants expressed the importance of having a positive relationship with service providers. They highlighted the need for service providers to be empathetic, compassionate and sincere. It was important to have respectful communication that was free of judgement so that they felt they were genuinely cared for by the service providers. Many participants did not have a supportive social network and placed value on their care providers to be active listeners. They also spoke of the need to have holistic treatment plans that were tailored to individual situation. Treatment should address multiple life issues, including physical and mental health, education, employment and housing. Participants recommended increasing awareness of services for problem gambling. They also recommended services be offered in a “one-stop-shop” environment. Many participants spoke of the need for services to address housing, substance use, physical and mental health, and employment issues in one safe location. There was also a need for timely services. In particular, the wait-times to get services for substance use were considered to be too long. Further, participants suggested that service providers should provide training on basic life skills, such as budgeting and stress management. Many described the value of peer mentoring by others with similar experiences.

How you can use this research

Gambling service providers can use this research to increase the range of services they offer to patients. These may include services for housing, mental health, and substance use problems. Gambling treatment programs may be more effective if they are tailored to the needs of patients. They should offer support for the multiple issues that persons with problem gambling may be experiencing. Researchers in the gambling

community should explore whether the service needs identified in this study are similar for women and people living in other cities and countries. Researchers should also explore the perspectives of service providers and decision-makers.

About the researchers

Sara J. T. Guilcher is an assistant professor at the Leslie Dan Faculty of Pharmacy at the University of Toronto. **Sarah Hamilton-Wright, Julia Woodhall-Melnik, Stephen W. Hwang, and Flora I. Matheson** are researchers at the Centre for Urban Health Solutions. **Wayne Skinner** is Clinical Director and **Peter Ferentzy** is a scientist at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. **Aklilu Wendaferew** is the Assistant Executive Director at Good Shepherd Ministries of Toronto.

For information about this research, please contact Sara Guilcher at sara.guilcher@utoronto.ca

Citation

Guilcher, S. J. T., Hamilton-Wright, S., Skinner, W., Woodhall-Melnik, J., Ferentzy, P., Wendaferew, A., Hwang, S. W., & Matheson, F. I. (2016). “Talk with me”: Perspectives on services for men with problem gambling and housing instability. *BMC Health Services Research*, 16, article 340. doi: 10.1186/s12913-016-1583-3

Keywords

Housing instability, problem gambling, services, men, homeless, complex needs

Gambling Research Exchange Ontario (GREO)

Gambling Research Exchange Ontario (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 responsible 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.

Learn more about GREO by visiting greo.ca or emailing info@greo.ca.

