

research snapshot

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The role of social gambling, low self-esteem, and deviant behaviours in adolescent problem gambling

What this research is about

Adolescents around the world may participate in gambling activities before they reach the legal age. In Hong Kong, Amusement Game Centers (AGCs) have become popular among adolescents. AGCs are indoor playgrounds with game machines, such as slot machines or video games. Players have to buy tokens to play, and wins are in the form of tokens. However, adolescents can sell or exchange tokens for money through illegal middlemen who stay in or outside the AGCs. As such, there are concerns that gaming in AGCs may become gateway to actual gambling.

Problem gambling occurs when an individual cannot control how much time and money they spend on gambling despite negative consequences to their life. These consequences may include debts, family conflicts, and work and school troubles. Research has shown that adolescents who are problem gamblers have lower self-esteem than adolescents who are not problem gamblers. They are also more likely to participate in deviant or delinquent acts.

Few studies have explored adolescent gambling in Hong Kong. Thus, this study aimed to find out what types of gambling activities would lead to problem gambling among adolescents in Hong Kong, including gaming in AGCs. It also explored the relationship between adolescent problem gambling, self-esteem, and deviant behaviours.

What the researcher did

The researcher recruited students from 18 secondary schools in Hong Kong. Students volunteered to fill out

What you need to know

This study examined what types of gambling activities would lead to problem gambling among adolescents in Hong Kong. It also explored the role of self-esteem and deviant behaviours. Participants were 2,775 adolescents between the ages of 12 and 17, who volunteered to fill out a survey.

Types of gambling activities were the strongest predictors of problem gambling. In particular, adolescents who played Poker, games in Amusement Game Centers (AGCs), or Lottery were at higher risk of being a problem gambler. Low self-esteem and committing deviant or delinquent acts also raised the risk of problem gambling.

Poker and many forms of gambling are often regarded as social activities for fun and entertainment. This study shows that there is a need to raise awareness about the harms of social gambling. Schools and social service agencies also need to develop strategies to increase self-esteem among at-risk adolescents.

a survey. Since this study targeted adolescents aged 12 to 17, those who fell outside this age range were excluded. As a result, this study involved the 2,775 adolescents who met the age requirement.

The survey asked the adolescents about their gambling behaviors, including types of gambling

activities in the past year. Gaming in ACGs was added as a type of gambling activity. The survey also assessed the severity of problem gambling, self-esteem, and deviant or delinquent acts. These included smoking, alcohol abuse, drug abuse, truancy, shoplifting, fighting, among others.

What the researcher found

Of the 2,775 adolescents, about 43.6% had gambled in the past year. The majority of adolescents were non-gamblers or non-problem gamblers. Mahjong and Poker were the two most popular gambling activities, followed by Internet gambling and gaming in ACGs. Many adolescents also played Mark Six Lottery, football betting, horse racing and casino gambling. These types of gambling activities are not legal for those under the age of 18.

Adolescents who were problem gamblers had the lowest self-esteem compared to non-gamblers and non-problem gamblers. Problem gamblers also committed deviant or delinquent acts more often than the other two groups.

Types of gambling activities were the strongest predictors of problem gambling. In particular, adolescents who played Poker, games in ACGs, or Mark Six lottery had a higher risk of being a problem gambler. Low self-esteem and participation in deviant or delinquent acts also raised the risk of problem gambling.

How you can use this research

The results of this study show that there is a need to raise awareness about the harms of social gambling and gaming in ACGs among parents and adolescents. Schools and social service agencies also need to develop strategies to increase self-esteem among adolescents who may be at-risk. Moreover, government authorities and gambling operators need to strengthen their efforts to prevent underage gambling.

About the Researcher

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Adolescents, pathological gambling, self-esteem, deviant behaviors, culture

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