

Parental gambling is associated with adolescents' attitude to gambling

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Background

The links between family influences and adolescent gambling behavior have not been extensively studied. There is some preliminary evidence of the family environment and family relationships being associated with adolescent gambling behavior. It is important to identify and elucidate the factors associated with adolescent gambling, including the potential influence of family behavior.

Methods

A survey was conducted in 2014 on 34,746 students attending 619 secondary schools, a sample that can be considered as representative of Italian 15- to 19-year-olds. The prevalence of different categories of gamblers was estimated by age group and gender. A multivariate logistic regression was applied to seek the association between youth and parental gambling.

Results

In our sample, 48.2% (47.7-48.7) of the students had experience of gambling in the previous year. They were classifiable as not at risk in 41.0% (40.5-41.5) of cases; at risk in 4.1% (3.9-4.3); and as having a problematic approach to gambling in 3.1% (2.9-3.3).

Multivariate analysis, adjusted for gender, age, school marks, parents' level of education, and money spent a week, demonstrated that parents' gambling behavior was associated with their children's gambling behavior, and particularly with: mothers who gambled, OR 1.377 [CI95% 1.281-1.479]; fathers who gambled, OR 1.938 [CI95% 1.834-2.047]; siblings who gambled, OR 2.143 [CI95% 1.989-2.309]; grandparents who gambled, OR 1.051 [CI95% 0.980-1.127]; and other relatives who gambled, OR 1.394 [CI95% 1.322-1.470].

Conclusions

Parental involvement in gambling could reflect parental approval, which has been associated with a higher likelihood of gambling among adolescents.

Adolescents are important targets of primary prevention strategies, but it is essential to include parents too, hopefully by means of large-scale public awareness campaigns through mass media, with a view to minimizing the harm caused by gambling by promoting a responsible behavior on the parents' part.

Key messages:

- Gambling is common among adolescents. The gambling behavior of parents and siblings is associated with young people's attitude to gambling
- Prevention programs should take a whole-family approach.