



Gender differences among adolescent gamblers

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ABSTRACT

Gambling has been considered a male pastime with research focused on exploring risk factors for gambling without considering gender differences. Despite gambling has greatly increased among women in recent years, few studies have explored gender differences in adolescent gamblers. This study analyzed gender differences in risk factors and gambling-related patterns. The sample comprised 1756 adolescents aged 14 to 17 years. Chi-square and *t*-tests were performed to examine differences between male and female gamblers ($n = 699$). Multiple regressions were conducted to explore predictors of gambling severity by gender. Male gamblers reported more gambling activity within the last year and showed a more severe gambling pattern. Impulsivity, last year prevalence of bingo, and other casino games were associated with higher gambling severity in both genders. Enhancement and coping motives were related to gambling severity only in males, while mixed-mode gambling was related to gambling severity in females. Our findings extend the research on gender differences among adolescent gamblers by showing that gender specific risk factors exist and should be regarded by health providers when designing treatment strategies.

1. Introduction

Problem gambling is defined as a recurrent behavior characterized by loss of control and excessive preoccupation with gambling, that leads to a significant impairment in occupational and social life areas (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). The prevalence of problem gambling among adolescent males is more than two times higher than in females (Edgren, Castren, Jokela, & Salonen, 2016). Due to the range of sociodemographic (e.g., low educational level), biological (e.g., low serotonin levels) and psychosocial (e.g., high impulsivity) variables proposed as risk factors for gambling initiation (Błaszczynski & Nower, 2002; Castrén et al., 2013; Pérez Fuentes, Molero Jurado, Carrión Martínez, Mercader Rubio, & Gázquez, 2016; Topf, Yip, & Potenza, 2009), current models of addiction conceptualize gambling within a biopsychosocial perspective (Griffiths, 2005). Accordingly, the differential impact of these variables might explain gender differences in problem gambling rates.

Despite the increasing number of studies exploring gambling prevalence among adolescents (Calado, Alexandre, & Griffiths, 2017), gender differences have been largely unexplored, and studies have yielded mixed results. Kaminer, Bursleson, and Jadamec (2002) found that although males experience more gambling problems, females display a younger age of gambling onset. While Stinchfield (2000) found

that more males reported gambling on the lottery and in casinos than females, Desai, Maciejewski, Pantalon, and Potenza (2005) showed no differences in the prevalence of casino and non-casino games by gender.

Potential factors underlying gender differences in gambling exist. Focusing on psychological factors, research on adult gamblers highlights that motives for gambling differ by gender. Females typically report gambling for managing dysphoria/depression, while males engage in gambling as a way of attaining self-enhancement (Petty, Stinson, & Grant, 2005; Stewart & Zack, 2008). Mixed results exist regarding impulsivity among problem gamblers, with some studies finding a stronger association in males (González-Ortega, Echeburúa, Corral, Polo-López, & Alberich, 2013) and others in females (Nigro, Cosenza, & Ciccarelli, 2017). From the social environment perspective, perception of economic profitability, and peer and parental gambling behavior differentially affect gambling by gender (Donati, Chiesi, & Primi, 2013). Lastly, testosterone levels have been shown to increase risk-taking decisions (Stanton, Liening, & Schultheiss, 2011), especially in females (Sapienza, Zingales, & Maestripieri, 2009). It is possible that this testosterone sensitivity leads to different gambling involvement in both sexes.

Other socio-environmental factors such as the educational level or the mode of gambling access (i.e., land-based, online, mixed-mode) have been largely unexplored in adolescents. As mixed-mode gambling

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is associated with the presence of gambling related problems (González-Roz, Fernández-Hermida, Weidberg, Martínez-Loredo, & Secades-Villa, 2016), it is important to consider the impact of specific modes of access separately by gender.

This paper explores gender differences among adolescent gamblers. The specific objectives were: 1) to estimate gender differences in gambling prevalence among adolescents; 2) to explore gender differences in gambling patterns; and 3) to identify risk factors for gambling separately by gender.

2. Material and methods

2.1. Participants

Participants were adolescents aged 14–17 years ($M = 15.22$, $SD = 0.74$). The initial sample size was made up of 1810 participants from 22 Spanish secondary schools in Asturias and Alicante (Spain). Recruitment was done between October 2015 and May 2016. Inclusion criteria were: 1) being aged < 18 years; 2) having no sensory impairment; 3) not presenting difficulties in understanding the Spanish language; and 4) not being diagnosed with an intellectual disability. Two participants were discarded due to intellectual disabilities and 9 because they were 18 years old. In accordance with the instructions of the Oviedo Infrequency Scale (Fonseca-Pedrero, Paino, Lemos-Giráldez, & Muñiz, 2008), 43 surveys with more than three erroneous responses were discarded from subsequent analyses. Thus, 1756 participants (53.6% males) comprised the final sample. Of them, 39.8% ($n = 699$, 437 males and 262 females) had gambled within the last year (see Table 1 for descriptive statistics). Power analyses were computed using GPower* and the guidelines posed by Mayr, Erdfelder, Buchner, and Faul (2007). A minimum sample size of 250 participants indicated an adequate statistical power for bivariate (98% power for Chi-Squared and 100% for t-tests, $\alpha = 0.05$, two-sided) and regression analyses (83% power to detect an odd ratio of 1.6, two-tails). The inclusion of a sample size larger than the one previously indicated guaranteed sufficient power.

2.2. Procedure

Schools were selected following a random stratified and incidental procedure and the study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Spanish Education Ministry.

Students completed an anonymous questionnaire using electronic tablets (Samsung Galaxy Tab2 10.1 tablet). Trained supervisors checked that they were doing the task appropriately.

2.3. Measures

Data regarding age, sex and family structure (i.e., living with no parents or with one or two parents) were collected. Participants were asked about their most frequent academic mark obtained in the last semester. This variable took the following values: outstanding (A and A+), notable (from B– to B+), good (from C– to C+) and failing (from F to D+). We also asked for the amount of weekly allowance. This variable took the following values: 0€–20€ (\$22.4); 21€–40€ (\$23.5–\$44.8); ≥ 41 € (\$45.9). The presence of participants' problematic gambling relatives was also assessed.

The Oviedo Infrequency Scale (Fonseca-Pedrero et al., 2008) was used for detecting random responses.

An ad-hoc survey assessed gambling engagement. We collected data on: mode of access, gambling activities engaged in within the last year, time and money spent per gambling occasion, age at gambling onset, last year's gambling involvement (defined as the number of games that participants engaged in over the last semester) and number of games in their first year of gambling. Gambling venues such as exclusively land based, online, or mixed-modes of access, and a set of gambling activities were evaluated. Given the low prevalence of online gambling ($n = 17$), this mode of access was not included in subsequent analyses. A land-based venue was defined as gambling in the last year through a terrestrial mode of access, exclusively. Mixed-mode access was defined as gambling in both land-based and online contexts (that is, gambling both online and offline in the same activity). Specifically, last year prevalence of bingo, poker, other casino games (OCGs), sports betting, lottery, scratch-tickets and electronic gambling machines (EGMs) was measured as a function of the above gambling modes.

Table 1
Sociodemographic characteristics of the final sample ($N = 1756$, left panel) and subsample of gamblers ($n = 699$, right panel).

	Females ($n = 814$)		Males ($n = 942$)		χ^2	p	Cramer's V	Female gamblers ($n = 262$)		Male gamblers ($n = 437$)		χ^2	p	Cramer's V
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%				<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%			
Family structure					0.092	0.955	0.007					0.060	0.970	0.009
Living with none of their parents	14 _a	1.7	18 _a	1.9				6 _a	2.3	9 _a	2.1			
Monoparental family	212 _a	26	246 _a	26.1				67 _a	25.6	110 _a	25.5			
Living with both parents	588 _a	72.3	678 _a	72				189 _a	72.1	318 _a	72.8			
Family with gambling problems	19 _a	2.3	22 _a	2.3	< 0.001	1.000	< 0.001	6 _a	2.3	14 _a	3.2	0.223	0.637	0.027
Most frequent academic mark ^a					30.654	< 0.001	0.137					12.959	0.005	0.142
Failing grade (from F to D+)	96 _a	12.8	142 _a	16.1				32 _a	13.2	68 _a	16.8			
Good (from C– to C+)	250 _b	33.2	382 _a	43.2				78 _b	32.2	173 _a	42.7			
Notable (from B– to B+)	302 _b	40.2	283 _a	32				97 _b	40.1	128 _a	31.6			
Outstanding (A and A+)	104 _b	13.8	77 _a	8.7				35 _b	14.5	36 _a	8.9			
Weekly allowance					7.722	0.021	0.066					3.229	0.199	0.068
0€–20€	744 _b	91.4	824 _a	87.5				229 _a	87.4	363 _a	83.1			
21€–40€	56 _a	6.9	88 _a	9.3				23 _a	8.8	58 _a	13.3			
41€	14 _a	1.7	30 _a	3.2				10 _a	3.8	16 _a	3.7			

Note. Subscripts indicate between-group differences. Groups with the same subscript did not differ significantly from each other.

^a $n = 1636$ (left panel) and 647 (right panel) participants due to technical problems in the data collection.

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