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Exploring perceptions and experiences of gambling-related stigma: Perspectives of people who gamble

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Background and aims: While stigma related to mental illness and substance use disorders has been extensively studied, research on gambling-related stigma remains limited. Problem gambling is often associated with negative stereotypes such as irresponsibility and greed, contributing to public stigma and internalized feelings of shame, anxiety, and guilt among affected individuals. This stigma acts as a significant barrier to help-seeking and treatment, exacerbating the harms experienced. To address this gap, the present study seeks to deepen understanding of gambling-related stigma by examining the lived experiences and perceptions of individuals who gamble. Methods: 1,189 people who gamble, aged 18-82 (M=39.3, SD=12.1) were recruited through Gordon Moody and Prolific to complete an online survey. The survey assessed gambling behaviour, problem gambling severity, experiences related to stigma and discrimination, and socio-demographic factors. Results: Among participants who gambled in the past year, 16.2% reported discrimination related to their gambling, often from family or friends. Discrimination was associated with increased anxiety, depression, stress, insomnia, and higher alcohol consumption. Overall, 36.9% of participants felt the need to hide their gambling from friends and/or family, and 19% expressed regret about their gambling behaviour. Among those who experienced stigma in the past 12 months (n = 192), these feelings were notably higher, with 68.7% hiding their gambling and 52.7% expressing regret. The correlation between the in-the-moment (state) feelings of shame and guilt and experienced discrimination or stigma related to gambling was r= 0.5, p<.001. *Conclusion:* This research highlights the need for enhanced public education and awareness campaigns to reframe gambling-related problems and harms, reduce stigma, and promote understanding of the risks and protective factors.

Keywords: gambling problem; self-stigma, guilt, shame, harms, discrimination

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