

Gambling Among Older Adults

Gambling is becoming a popular form of entertainment for older adults. The expansion of legalized gambling has led to more and more older adults turning to casinos and other gambling venues for their entertainment. The increased availability coupled with incentives offered by gambling venues, which directly target older adults, make this an increasingly popular form of entertainment.

Older adults are not immune to developing gambling related problems. Most older adults are able to gamble without experiencing problems. However, some do develop problems as a result of gambling. Although most national estimates of prevalence rates suggest lower levels of disordered gambling among the elderly, many regional studies have found high rates for older adults. For instance, one study found that 9.7% of their senior center sample reported disordered gambling.

Older adults may be at increased risk for gambling-related problems. Older adults may be more vulnerable to the development of gambling-related problems due to a number of factors. Disordered gambling among adults in the general population has been associated with high blood pressure, stomach and intestinal problems, and cardiovascular problems. Because older adults are already at increased risk for experiencing health-related problems, additional stressors associated with problematic gambling may serve to exacerbate their health problems. Older adults are also more likely to have fixed incomes and less earning capacity due to their limited ability to work. This may make it more difficult to recuperate from gambling losses, especially those incurred as a result of disordered gambling. Increased discretionary time may also make older adults more vulnerable to the development of gambling-related problems.

Detecting problem gambling among older adults may be a difficult endeavor. It may be very difficult to detect problem gambling among older adults for a number of reasons. Older adults may be less likely to seek help when faced with disordered gambling and may present to health care professionals with physical and other psychological symptoms that may mask the gambling disorder. Identification of gambling problems may also be difficult because increased time gambling and guilt associated with the activity can lead to increased isolation from families, friends, and co-workers. Screening instruments for problem gambling, which often include items that are not often relevant to older adults, may also underestimate the severity of a gambling problem.

It is important to be aware of the signs associated with disordered gambling among older adults. Such markers may include feelings of depression or anxiety, social withdrawal, feeling guilty or sad about gambling, wagering more money than intended, spending large amounts of time gambling, having large blocks of time that cannot be accounted for, and having difficulty meeting physical needs due to failure to pay bills or buy medications or food.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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