



Key results from the Swelogs in-depth study – a report on problem gambling and health

In order to develop effective preventative measures for gambling harm, knowledge of the risk and protective factors that affect or counteract gambling problems is required. The report “Risk and protective factors for problem gambling– findings from the Swelogs in-depth study” presents the most recent knowledge in this area based on Swedish data. This fact sheet summarises the most important findings from the report.

An in-depth study is being conducted within the framework of the Public Health Agency of Sweden’s population study Swelogs. The study’s main results show that there are several factors linked to gambling problems.

We have found that impulsivity, an insecure childhood, earlier gambling problems and problems with alcohol or other drugs are factors that affect the risk of developing gambling problems. In other words, these are probable risk factors for problem gambling. There are also a number of other factors that are important for a person’s ability to recover from problem gambling.

Not having had alcohol, drug or earlier gambling problems may make it easier to recover from problem gambling. These are considered recovery factors. A belief that you can make a profit from your gambling also seems to have an

impact on the risk of developing gambling problems. One factor that may counteract gambling problems is to have friends who do not think that gambling is important. It is not yet known if these two last factors arise before, at the same time or after a person develops gambling problems.



RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Risk factors are circumstances that increase the risk of developing gambling problems. Protective factors are circumstances that increase resistance to developing gambling problems or lessen the effect of risk factors. When identifying relevant risk and protective factors, aspects such as gender, age and education are taken into account in the analyses.

Further factors

The Public Health Agency of Sweden has identified further factors that may influence the development of gambling problems.¹ The individual’s gambling context and motivation, e.g. lack of knowledge about chance and poor ability to handle negative feelings, seems to be linked to problem gambling. Demographic and socio-economic factors such as financial difficulties and violence and insecurity in the neighbourhood where a person lives may also play a part. Factors related to the individual such as poor mental health, suicidal tendencies and negative life events seem to be further factors that are linked to problem gambling.

There is also co-variation between the factors.² In our study, we have seen that factors such as “gambling is

1. For these factors, comprehensive analyses have not been completed as those outlined above. It is therefore still unclear if these factors are risk factors and to what extent they affect the development of gambling problems.
2. Co-variation means that identified factors change together when a new factor is introduced, either in the same or opposite directions. Factors that co-vary may be linked, i.e. one factor influences another, but not necessarily.

important among friends”, “lower degree of ability to cope”, “negative life events” and “lower degree of social activity” co-vary at the same time as they are linked to gambling problems. Gamblers who are affected by several factors at the same time are probably more vulnerable than others.

Preventing gambling problems

The knowledge that has been gathered about risk factors and other factors that influence gambling problems can form a basis for developing prevention methods. Methods may, for example, aim to reduce the risk of developing gambling problems by reducing the influence that an insecure childhood, alcohol and drug problems and impulsivity have on an individual. Since earlier gambling problems is a probable risk factor for developing gambling problems again, it is important to develop and promote relapse prevention methods.

Prevention methods may also focus on gambling-specific factors that have been identified; belief in increased income from gambling and having friends who do not think gambling is important.

It is also possible to reduce the risk of people developing gambling problems through preventive programmes that improve people’s coping ability, support those who experience negative life events and increase their level of social activity.

A helpline for gamblers and their family and friends is available via phone, e-mail or chat: www.stodlinjen.se/other-languages/in-english/, phone no +46 (0)20-81 91 00

Swelogs

Swelogs, the Swedish longitudinal gambling study, is a Swedish population study of health and gambling being conducted over seven years, between 2008 and 2015. The study aims to build an evidence base to develop effective preventive measures against the harmful effects of excessive gambling. The roughly 8,000 randomly selected respondents between the ages of 16 and 84 who took part in the baseline study will be contacted at least three more times during the course of the study. The degree of gambling problems was assessed based on the measurement instrument Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI).

Read more at www.folkhalsomyndigheten.se



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