

Anxiety Disorders among Gambling Addicts

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Abstract

Introduction: Anxiety is an emotion generated by the anticipation of a diffuse, difficult to predict and control danger. Professionals in mental health consider that approximately 40% of gambling addicts have an anxiety disorder at least once in life.

Objectives: This paper aims to underline the existence of different forms of anxiety among gambling addicts.

Methods: We used for this research 119 gambling addicts who were tested according to Hamilton Anxiety Rating Scale.

Results: According to the statistical data obtained, 64.71% of the subjects showed a form of anxiety.

Conclusions: Results of the research validated the initial hypothesis according to which a significant percent of gambling addicts have different intensities of anxiety.

Keywords: Anxiety disorders; Gambling addicts; Comorbidity

Introduction

Anxiety is one of the most frequent disorders met in the psychiatry and is characterised by a diffuse and unpleasant feeling of fear and restlessness, accompanied by vegetative symptoms: headache, perspiration, palpitations, tachycardia, and gastric discomfort [1]. Pathological anxiety appears when the daily functionality is affected by unsuitable reactions to interior conflicts or due to the anticipation of a potential threat.

Gambling has unprecedentedly developed during the last years and caused devastating negative consequences for gamblers and their families. Robson et al. [2] specified that the normal gambler, who does not show any form of addiction, allocates to this activity less than 5% of his monthly budget and gambles maximum one day per week, for not more than 3 hours.

Specialists in the field estimate that the prevalence of gambling addiction among population is between 0.8% and 5% of adults [3], higher percent being reported for teenagers: 5.2% in USA, 6.4% in Canada [4]; 4.4% in Australia; 5.6% in England [5]; 4.5% in Spain; 3.6% in Serbia [6]. A systematic review conducted by Calado et al. [7] since 2000 to 2015 concluded that the gambling rates in Europe and different countries in the world is among 0.12% and 5.8%.

Gambling addiction has the following negative consequences: depression, suicidal thoughts, anxiety, alcohol and drug consumption, difficulties in keeping a job, lies and deception, the decrease of cognitive performance, physical symptoms [8-10].

There are numerous studies which associate anxiety and gambling addiction [11-15].

Anxiety affects thinking, perception and learning; it can distort perceptions and decrease the power of focus, associative and evocative memory. From a psych-physiological point of view, a series of manifestations are characteristic to anxiety: tremor, headaches, increase of blood pressure, perspiration, modification of the muscular tonus, modification of the electric conductance of the skin as well as the modification of the cardio frequency.

A meta-analysis of studies done in the USA, Korea, Canada and Switzerland between 1998 and 2010 revealed that 60.1% of the addicted gamblers have at the same time a nicotine addiction, 57.5% use substances, 37.9% show mood changes and 37.4% have at least one form of anxiety [16].

The objective of this paper is to show that addicted gamblers show different types of anxiety.

The hypothesis of the research is that there is a significant positive association between gambling addiction and anxiety among participants in the study.

Method

Participants

This study used a sample of 119 addicted gambler aged between 17 and 61, 7 women and 112 men, 74 of them highly educated and 45 with secondary education. 95 subjects (79.8%) declared they were married, while 24 (20.2%) were unmarried; 48 subjects come from rural areas and 71 from urban areas.

As concerning employment, 25 subjects were unemployed; 12 were students and the rest of 82 subjects had a stable job. The subjects were selected from people who approached a centre of psychological

counselling for gambling addiction and obtained scored bigger than 5 at South Oaks Gambling Screen, which allowed us to consider them addicted gamblers.

Instruments and Procedure

For the purposes of this research we used 2 instruments: South Oaks Screen-SOGS [17] and Hamilton Anxiety Rating Scale-HAM-A [18].

South Oaks Gambling Screen-SOGS is the most used instrument to diagnose gambling addiction. It was created in 1987 by Lesieur and Blume and contains 20 items which correlate with the criteria for diagnosing gambling from DSM-IV-TR. The advantage of SOGS is the easiness in applying and the way of counting the score as well as the fact that it proved to be useful in diagnosing gambling at both adults and teenagers.

Hamilton Anxiety Rating Scale (HAM-A) is an instrument used to evaluate anxiety, which contains 14 items developed for the first time by Hamilton (1959). This scale provides a global evaluation of anxiety and identifies psychic as well as somatic symptoms and can be used to detect symptoms of anxiety and to evaluate their severity.

Results

After applying South Oaks Gambling Screen the researched sample (N=119) obtained an average value of the score of 10.55; the lowest score was 7 and the highest 14, both of them indicating a form of gambling addiction (Table 1).

Total SOGS		
N	Valid	119
	Missing	0
Mean		10,55
Median		10,00
Mode		9
Standard deviation		1,784
Skewness		,059
Kurtosis		-1,139
Minimum		7
Maximum		14

Table 1: Statistical indicators: SOGS.

After applying Anxiety Rating Scale-HAM-A, the researched sample (N=119) obtained an average value of the score for anxiety of mg 1=15.08, which is the inferior limit of the area of moderate anxiety (Table 2). As concerning the standard deviation of the scores from the average (10.411), this value indicates a division of the data characteristic to a homogeneous population as degree of anxiety (Figure 1).

Total Anxiety		
N	Valid	119
	Missing	0

Mean	15,08
Median	13,00
Mode	5
Standard deviation	10,411
Skewness	413
Kurtosis	-1,228
Minimum	2
Maximum	39

Table 2: Statistical indicators: HAM-A.

The distribution of the scores is the following: 29.41% of subjects show a moderate form of anxiety; 26.05% show a mild anxiety and 9.24% have a severe form of anxiety.

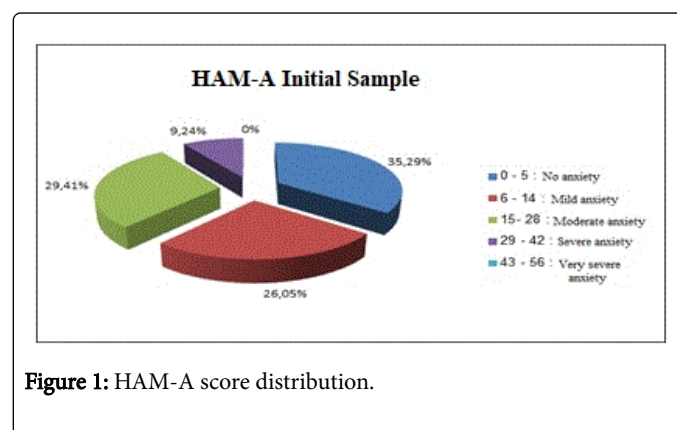


Figure 1: HAM-A score distribution.

Discussion

The hypothesis of the paper is that addicted gamblers could suffer from anxiety at the same time. The results obtained after applying the tests validate out hypothesis: 64.71% of the subjects have at the same time a form of anxiety.

These results correspond to the results of other studies done internationally and which showed significant correlations between gambling addiction and anxiety and depression disorders [19-25].

Conclusion

The measures to prevent the emergence of gambling addiction and mitigate associated risks, including the development of anxiety, are centered on the assumption that adults assume responsibility for their own choices, as public perception is that the governments and promoters of gambling bear all the responsibility for the negative consequences associated with gambling addiction.

Disley et al. [26] believed that primary prevention measures refer to warning campaigns done by the media, online information centers, youth education initiatives, and corporate programs that promote responsible gaming.

Specialists in the field of mental health believe that providing psychological counseling for gambling addiction is effective if it meets the following conditions: it is free; addresses both game and related

addictions and is carried out both individually and within the family of addicts, under conditions of complete confidentiality.

In Romania, the "Responsible Gambling" program was set up to prevent the emergence of gambling addiction and to promote a responsible social gambling, which is assigned a pre-defined amount of money and a limited amount of time [27,28]. Within this program, a team of psychologists offers free psychological counseling to troubled gamblers and their partners, under confidentiality.

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