Gambling and Stigma

While many people view gambling as a socially acceptable way to have fun, there is a certain level of social stigma attached to it. For some, gambling itself is suspect. When it comes to people who are perceived as 'problem gamblers,' the stigma is even stronger. Public attitudes include negative stereotypes about people seen as problem gamblers. People with gambling problems often internalize the stigma, which may prevent them from seeking help.

This lesson aims to engage students in exploring various issues related to gambling and stigma and challenge them to consider the potential impacts stigma might have on different groups of people: those who gamble, those with gambling problems, and the people around them.

Instructional strategies

1. Ask the students to grab a pen and a piece of paper and write down what they think stigma is (there is no right or wrong answer here, this is about their thoughts). Then ask them to compare their definition with another classmate and discuss their ideas about what stigma means to them.
2. Watch the Khan Academy video about stigma with the students. Then, facilitate a discussion about the issues discussed with questions such as those below:
    a. What are your thoughts on the video? What did you find interesting or learn from it?
    b. According to the video, stigma partially overlaps with things like stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination. How might stereotypes, prejudices or discrimination negatively impact people?
    c. What else might stigma refer to other than stereotypes, prejudices or discrimination? Is it possible for stigma to ever have a positive impact? Explain.
    d. Where does stigma come from? Explain.
3. In groups or as a class, ask students to read one of the following groups of quotes from a recent study on the stigma of problem gambling and use questions like those provided to encourage them to think critically about the issues. Repeat with as many of the groups of quotes as you have time for.

    When participants were asked about the feelings they had about being associated with having a gambling problem

    "It makes you think that they're looking at you and seeing that weakness and perhaps that's all they're ever going to see after that and they're never going to be able to see you as successful or well-rounded and everything else" … "So a lot of the time I don't actually think about what others think about me because I can hide it, keep it to myself. It's probably just me judging me, rather than them judging me"

    "I think I've got every aspect of my life, apart from that, I'm well and truly in control of – but to have the lack of control with gambling – it's sort of like gas that leaks I suppose"

    a. Both participants quoted seem to regard their relationship with gambling as a personal weakness. In what ways are their feelings similar? In what ways are they different? Explain.
    b. These quotes suggest a level of self-stigma. How is that different than healthy self-evaluation? Explain.
    c. What various factors might be contributing to the two participants' attitudes and beliefs about themselves? What factors might explain the differences?
    d. What impact might these attitudes and beliefs have on the participants?
    e. If these participants were your friends, how might you help them?

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When asked about <u>feeling judged</u> or discriminated against

"Sometimes, my sister says – because my brother-in-law and I ... put in ten dollars each on a Saturday and have a bet. Sometimes, I'll have a bet on a Sunday, and she goes, 'Well T doesn't' – T's her husband – 'T doesn't find the need to bet on a Sunday.' So she's kind of having a go at me, why am I having a bet on a Sunday?"

"Yeah, I've been judged because somebody will want me to go out for dinner with them, have a girls' day out with them and I'll say, 'Oh no, I'm busy' and [they say] 'Yeah, yeah busy at the club.' Yeah so that's how I feel I'm being judged. Or if they don't say it … I know what they're thinking, or I think I know what they're thinking."

a. How are the situations reflected in these two quotes similar? How are they different?
b. What do you think the sister means when she says that her husband "doesn't find the need to bet on a Sunday"? What does her comment imply about her brother? Why do you think she might feel the need to compare her husband and her brother?
c. The participant in the second quote feels judged. Is her feeling justified? Do you think her feelings come from the reaction of her friends? Do they come from her own attitudes and beliefs? Or from other factors? Explain.
d. What impacts do you think the comments and reactions from family and friends have on the participants? How might those comments or reactions affect the relationships? Explain.

When asked about the <u>reactions of others</u> to whom the gambling problem was disclosed

"Well, I thought they'd support me but they haven't ... I'll say, 'Look, I enjoy going to the club', and then I can see the look of disdain in their faces. You know, can't you do something better like clean your house instead of spending all the time at [the club]?"

"My whole family pretty reacted positively to it in their way; like some people didn't understand but they stood by me anyway, so really, the fear and the stigma that was attached was unfounded in my case after that"

"Like being looked down on, almost as if it was criminal. You know what I mean? As if what I was doing, even though I wasn't harming anyone but myself, was a criminal – Well, that's how they – I perceived them to look at me … For example, my best friend … when I opened up to him about it, he reacted really angrily because he felt like I was wasting my life and my money and my current situation with my family. And I thought he would've been more sympathetic to my situation, but he reacted angrily to me. It shocked me!"

a. In what ways are the feelings expressed in these quotes similar? How are they different?
b. Why do you think the first participant thought her family would support her? Why do you think they failed to meet her expectation?
c. Why do you think the reported reactions from relatives in the first two quotes are so different? What factors might influence how families respond to a loved one who has a gambling problem?
d. The participant in the last quote is shocked because his best friend is angry at him. Beyond what it says in the quote, why do you think the friend may have reacted the way he did? Why was the participant shocked?
e. How might the way relatives or friends react impact (positively or negatively) the person experiencing a gambling problem? How might the person experiencing the problem influence the ways people around them react?

When asked if stigma was <u>beneficial or harmful</u>

"Like it's a good deterrent for people. But once you are addicted, then, you know ... you need to have support and not be judged"

"I think it can have a beneficial effect because ... if you can overcome the problem it makes you a stronger person. And you – by achieving success in not gambling – you feel a lot better about yourself and you realise that you do have the necessary qualities to overcome those problems. But then, you know, if you relapse, well that all goes downhill again for a little while"

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"Probably just harmful. It guilts you into trying to be something be better and trying to do something about it, which is probably not the way. You should probably come to that realisation yourself through other methods, not by being guilted into feeling bad about it even though you know it is the wrong thing. You've got to realise in other ways, I think. So it's probably more harmful"

"I think it's harmful, incredibly harmful. If it wasn't, if it didn't have so much stigma attached to it, possibly more people might think about that they might have a problem, but because of the stigma that I believe is attached to it, it pushes your subconscious, pushes you further into denial"

a. Why do you think the feelings about this issue are so different, as reflected in the above quotes? What does it say about stigma?
b. Do you think stigma can be both beneficial and harmful? If so, how? Discuss your answer.

4. As a class, discuss the following quote from the same study on the stigma of problem gambling. This quote, however reflects the ideas of some counsellors who work with people who have gambling problems.

"Some counsellors strongly considered the 'gamble responsibly' message to add to problem gambling stigma, by conveying that people were personally at fault for having a gambling problem because they were irresponsible, which added further blame for their perceived failings."

a. What are your thoughts on this quote? What assumptions is it making?
b. Do you think that encouraging people to gamble responsibly implies they are at fault if they have a gambling problem? Why or why not?
c. How might the 'gamble responsibly' message impact people (positively or negatively)? Can it help folks who gamble manage their habit and make safer gambling choices? Discuss.

Gambling competencies

Big ideas

- Gambling can be a fun recreational activity but can also lead to significant harm
- As humans, both individually and as communities, we need to learn how to manage gambling in our midst
- We can learn how to control gambling by examining the different ways people have thought about it, engaging in critical self-reflection and listening to each other

Competencies

- Assess the complex ways in which gambling is linked to human culture and impacts the health and wellbeing of individuals, families, communities and societies
- Consider dominant social discourses and assess their impact on the distribution of risk and benefit associated with gambling
- Develop personal and social skills to reflect on and manage personal behaviour and choices related to gambling
- Recognize binary constructs (e.g., win vs lose or success vs failure) and assess their limitation in addressing complex social issues like gambling

For a complete look at the gambling literacy competencies, as defined by the Centre for Addictions Research of BC, see: www.uvic.ca/research/centres/cisur/assets/docs/iminds/hs-gambling-curriculum.pdf

Links to Curriculum

First Peoples' principles of learning

- Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors
- Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place)
- Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one's actions
- Learning involves patience and time
- Learning requires exploration of one's identity

Social studies 10

Competencies

- Use Social Studies inquiry processes and skills to: ask questions; gather, interpret, and analyze ideas; and communicate findings and decisions
- Assess the significance of people, places, events and developments, and compare varying perspectives on their historical significance at particular times and places, and from group to group
- Assess how prevailing conditions and the actions of individuals or groups affect events, decisions, and developments
- Explain different perspectives on past or present people, places, issues, and events, by comparing norms, values, worldviews, and beliefs
- Make reasoned ethical judgments about controversial actions in the past and present, and whether we have a responsibility to respond

This resource was developed by the Centre for Addictions Research of BC with funding provided by the BC Responsible & Problem Gambling Program. Any views expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the BC Responsible & Problem Gambling Program or the Centre for Addictions Research of BC.

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