



Synopsis

Group-based interventions to reduce gambling involvement among male football fans: a synopsis of findings from a feasibility study

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Plain language summary

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Why did we do this research?

We wanted to explore ways to help people who might be at risk of harm from gambling. Gambling harm can cause serious problems for both individuals and society, affecting finances, relationships and health, and can include thinking about suicide or trying to harm oneself. We focused on sports betting because it is popular among younger men who are more likely to develop gambling issues. We aimed to create a programme to prevent these problems, working within professional football clubs, which have been successful in running programmes for men's health, like weight loss.

What did we do?

We developed a programme called Football Fans and Betting and trained coaches at football clubs to run it. The programme included educational sessions about gambling harms, along with activities, such as five-a-side football, to promote social connections. We planned to test Football Fans and Betting in a pilot trial at four professional football clubs in England.

What did we find?

Despite significant efforts, we faced challenges getting people to join the programme. Some people did not think they needed help, while others with more severe gambling issues needed specialised support beyond what Football Fans and Betting offered. It was also hard to convince men in social circles where gambling was seen as normal to join. Some participants were sceptical about the intentions behind the football clubs' delivery of Football Fans and Betting, when many of them also had partnerships with gambling companies. There was also stigma associated with gambling, which meant many men did not think they had a problem, or did not want to admit they did. Ultimately, we could not recruit enough participants to move forward with the planned trial. Despite this, the programme was more attractive to people with higher levels of gambling harm than we originally intended, and it identified a high level of unmet need among this group. The people who did take part in the study found it helpful, and thought there was a need for a programme like Football Fans and Betting to tackle gambling harm.

What does this mean for understanding the role of sports-based interventions for men at risk of gambling harm?

Our study showed that promoting interventions to prevent gambling harm within professional football clubs is very difficult, especially when those clubs have partnerships with gambling companies. Future efforts might need to focus on community-based programmes not influenced by commercial gambling ties. Early intervention remains crucial in preventing serious harms from gambling.