The WAGER, Vol. 3(14) – Screening veterans for pathological gambling

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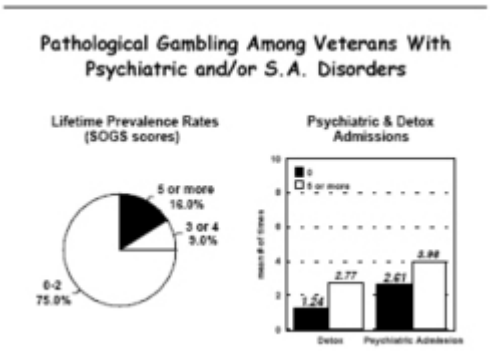
Individuals with substance abuse or other psychiatric disorders have been shown to have higher rates of pathological gambling disorders than individuals without psychiatric disorders1. During the past 3 years, researchers at a Veterans Administration Hospital routinely screened a sample of 250 veterans with substance abuse and/or other psychiatric disorders for lifetime pathological gambling disorders using the SOGS (South Oaks Gambling Screen)2. They found 16% (n=40) of these veterans screened positive for pathological gambling (a score of 5 or more) and 9% screened positive for "probable pathological gambling" (a score of 3 or 4). A medical record review of this sample revealed that prior to this study, only 1 had been diagnosed with pathological gambling disorder. In addition, among the subsample who had been previously admitted for inpatient psychiatric treatment, the group of pathological gamblers (scores of 5 or more) were compared with the group of veterans with no gambling problems (scores of 0). Compared to the no-problem group, pathological gamblers were admitted significantly more often for psychiatric problems and for drug or alcohol detoxification. Federman et al.'s estimates fall within the range revealed by a meta-analysis of prevalence studies, which observed patients in treatment had lifetime rates of disordered gambling of 14.23 (10.70-17.75).



Sources:

1. Shaffer, H.J., Hall, M.N., & Vander Bilt, J. (1997). Estimating the prevalence of

disordered gambling behavior in the United States and Canada: A meta-analysis. Boston: President and Fellows of Harvard College;

2. Federman, E.J., Krebs, C., Drebing, C.E., Colburn, N., Beaman, A., Marshall, J. & Penk, W. (1998, April). Gambling: An under-diagnosed and costly disorder. Poster session presented at the NIDA Town Meeting, Boston, MA .