Medical Xpress

Four kinds of compulsive gamblers identified

October 14 2010

Four kinds of compulsive gamblers have been identified. Credit: SINC

Disorganised and emotionally unstable, poorly adapted, suffering from alcohol problems, impulsive, or with a "globally adapted" personality. These are the features of the four diagnosed types of compulsive gamblers identified by researchers at the University Hospital of Bellvitge (IDIBELL) and the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB). According to the scientific team, only one of these four shows signs of a significant pathology.

"We need to use different treatments for each sub-group of pathological gamblers in order to respond to their specific therapeutic difficulties and needs", Susana Jiménez Murcia, co-author of the study and coordinator of the Pathological Gambling Unit at the Bellvitge-IDIBELL Hospital in Barcelona, tells SINC.

The results of the study, which has been published in the Canadian Journal of Psychiatry, show that it is possible to distinguish four groups of pathological gamblers based on their personality traits and associated psychopathology.

According to the researchers, who studied 1,171 people, types I and II are pathological gamblers who exhibit problems in controlling their responses, "but only type II shows signs of a significant concurrent psychopathology", with high levels of impulsiveness and sensation-seeking.

Resisting the urge to gamble

Pathological gambling has been defined as a progressive and chronic collapse in the ability to resist the urge to gamble. It is a kind of behaviour that damages and harms personal, family and career-related goals (APA, 2000). In mental illness manuals, pathological gambling is classified as a "disruption in the ability to control impulses".

"However, this classification has generated a certain degree of polemic among the scientific community, due to the high degree of heterogeneity that exists in this disorder", the researcher explains.

For this reason, the scientific community is now looking into the possibility of introducing a new diagnostic category called "behavioural and substance addictions" in the new editions of manuals such as the Quinto Manual Diagnóstico y Estadístico de los Trastornos Mentales (DSM-5) (Fifth Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders).

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Type I, which could be called 'disorganised and emotionally unstable', is

characterised by schizotypal personality traits, high degrees of impulsiveness, alcohol and substance abuse, psychopathological alterations and early onset age.

Type II, which is a schizoid type, exhibits high levels of harm avoidance, social distancing, and alcohol abuse.

Type III is reward-sensitive, and is characterised by high levels of sensation-seeking and impulsiveness, although without any psychopathological alterations.

Type IV is a high functioning, globally-adapted personality type, without any disorders relating to substance abuse, and no associated psychopathological alterations.

More information: Eva Mª Álvarez-Moya, Susana Jiménez-Murcia, María Neus Aymamí, Mónica Gómez-Peña, Roser Granero, Juanjo Santamaría, José Manuel Menchón y Fernando Fernández-Aranda. "Subtyping Study of a Pathological Gamblers Sample". *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, Vol 55, No 8, Aug 2010.

Provided by FECYT - Spanish Foundation for Science and Technology

Citation: Four kinds of compulsive gamblers identified (2010, October 14) retrieved 25 April 2024 from https://medicalxpress.com/news/2010-10-kinds-compulsive-gamblers.html

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