

A rapid review of the influence of family on gambling behaviours

What this research is about

Gambling-related harm is a significant public health concern. It is linked to financial loss, relationship breakdown, and negative effects on physical and mental health. Family is increasingly recognized as having a critical role in influencing gambling behaviours.

Previous reviews offered insights on how family may affect gambling behaviours. For instance, parental gambling has a significant influence on the gambling behaviours of children and adolescents. Family can also have a protective effect against harmful gambling. Moreover, involving family members in treatment for gambling-related harm has been found to be associated with better treatment outcomes as well as improved individual and family functioning. This review examined recent studies exploring the role of family to better understand how family shapes gambling behaviours across the lifespan.

What the researchers did

The researchers carried out a rapid review of recent studies published between 2018 and 2024. They followed the PRISMA guidelines for the review. The researchers searched the following academic databases for relevant studies: Scopus, PsychINFO, and PubMed. Studies had to be published in English, use a gambling-related measure, and focus on gambling behaviours in the adult population. Studies also had to measure at least one family factor. These factors might be family sociodemographic characteristics, general family climate, family attitudes and behaviours, parenting practices, or family relationship characteristics.

The researchers identified 36 studies and assessed their quality using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool

What you need to know

This rapid review explored the influence of family on gambling. A total of 36 studies published between 2018 and 2024 were examined. The findings revealed that family significantly impacts gambling behaviours through two aspects: family environment in childhood and family environment in adulthood. Gambling might become normalized within the family and increase the risk for harm. This risk is also influenced by family characteristics such as parental relationship, household income, and domestic violence. Family can also mitigate gambling-related harm, and involving family in therapy can be beneficial.

(MMAT). Narrative synthesis was used to identify the key themes across the included articles.

What the researchers found

Of the 36 studies, 26 were quantitative studies, 8 took a mixed-methods approach, and 2 were qualitative studies. The studies took place across 5 different settings, with 16 studies from North America, 8 from Europe, 5 from the UK, 5 from Oceania, and 2 from Africa. The most commonly used gambling measure was the Problem Gambling Severity Index.

The researchers identified two main themes: family environment in childhood and family environment in adulthood.

Family environment in childhood. A total of 23 studies related to this theme, with three sub-themes.

- (1) Normalization of gambling in childhood. Many adults harmed by gambling reported being introduced to gambling at a young age through

their family. Siblings or parents were often identified as the primary family members who gambled. The father was reported more frequently than other family members. In one study, women were more likely to report gambling by their mother, while men were more likely to report gambling by their father.

- (2) Structure of the family in childhood. Eight studies related to this theme. The relationship status of parents during childhood was the most commonly examined characteristic. Parental separation/divorce in childhood was associated with increased risk of gambling-related harm in adulthood. Other aspects of the family structure that increased the risk of harm included lower household income and a family history of mental health and substance use disorders.
- (3) Negative childhood experiences. Thirteen studies looked at gambling-related harm in adulthood and self-reported negative childhood experiences. There was a relationship between childhood maltreatment and trauma and increased risk of gambling-related harm.

Family environment in adulthood. A total of 22 studies related to this theme, with 3 sub-themes.

- (1) Structure of the family in adulthood. Twelve studies related to this theme. A commonly examined factor was marital status, with people experiencing gambling-related harm being more likely to be single or divorced. Relationship conflicts, stressful caregiving responsibilities, and lower household income were also commonly reported by people experiencing harm.
- (2) Domestic violence. Five studies looked at the impact of domestic violence on gambling. There was a relationship between frequent gambling and experience of family abuse or violence.
- (3) Preservation and prevention in adulthood. Eight studies focused on this theme. Family was found to be an important factor for maintaining gambling behaviours throughout childhood and into adulthood. But family dynamics in adulthood also plays a crucial role in harm prevention, and involving family in therapy can be beneficial.

How you can use this research

This review can inform researchers, treatment providers, and public health.

About the researchers

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