

Lived experiences of people who have recovered or are in recovery from problem gambling

What this research is about

Problem gambling (PG) is a serious public health issue that is linked to a number of harms. Gambling opportunities have grown in recent years, notably in online gambling and sports betting. The increased availability of gambling opportunities has led to concerns over a rise in gambling harms.

In response, a range of harm-reduction tools have been implemented by gambling operators, such as self-exclusion, time outs, and monetary limits.

Unfortunately, these measures have been found to have limited effectiveness for people experiencing PG. The use of gambling-blocking software has emerged as a promising intervention. Gamban is a software that was designed to restrict access to online gambling websites. Although Gamban has more than 460,000 users, there is limited research on the experiences of people with this tool.

The present study aimed to explore the experiences of people who had recovered or were in recovery from PG. All participants used Gamban. The theoretical foundation of the study was based upon three models: the cognitive-behavioural model of addiction, the transtheoretical model of change, and self-determination theory. These frameworks help to explain how people acknowledge gambling-related difficulties, what motivate them to change, and how interventions have helped in their recovery journey.

What the researchers did

The researchers recruited 33 adults living in the USA who self-described as having recovered or being currently in recovery from PG. All participants were recruited through Gamban. The founder of Gamban

What you need to know

This study explored the experiences of people who had recovered or were in recovery from gambling harms. The researchers interviewed 33 adults living in the USA who used Gamban, a gambling-blocking software. A sentiment analysis revealed that participants mostly expressed negative sentiments tied to financial losses, emotional distress, and relationship issues. Some positive sentiments were also expressed that were tied to resilience, personal growth, and cautious optimism regarding recovery, rather than gambling. Key themes were identified that were related to challenges with responsible gambling, mental health and identity, and recovery from gambling, with Gamblers Anonymous, therapy, and digital blocking tools like Gamban being seen as helpful.

emailed members with an invitation to take part in a brief survey hosted on Qualtrics. The survey gathered preliminary information. Potential participants were then invited to take part in an interview with the research team over Zoom. Of the 33 participants, 21 were male and 12 were female. The majority of participants were in their 20s and 30s.

The interviews were designed to capture first-hand accounts and perspectives on PG and recovery. The interviews lasted between 35 and 60 minutes. The researchers first conducted sentiment analysis to understand the emotional tone underlying the interview responses. They then conducted thematic analysis to identify key themes and sub-themes.

What the researchers found

Sentiment analysis

The sentiment analysis revealed that negative sentiments dominated the interview responses. Participants commonly described negative emotions tied to financial losses, emotional distress, and damaged relationships from gambling. Some participants also expressed positive sentiments related to resilience, personal growth, and cautious optimism regarding recovery despite the harms. Positive sentiments were rare and typically related to recovery milestones rather than gambling itself.

Thematic analysis

Three key themes were identified, as well as several sub-themes. Each theme was also compared by gender. The first theme was *responsible gambling*. Participants mentioned sports betting and online gambling the most frequently. For men, sports betting was the dominant theme, whereas for women, it was online gambling. Concerns with self-exclusion, ineffective responsible gambling tools, and promotions were also frequently mentioned.

The second theme was *mental health and identity*. Participants described mental health concerns related to gambling, with the most frequently mentioned being depression, stigma, and relationship issues. Men tended to emphasize internal issues like depression and stigma, along with relationship issues. Women more often highlighted marriage and relationship issues, along with emotional consequences like shame.

The third theme was *gambling recovery*. The most frequently mentioned was Gamblers Anonymous, followed by therapy and digital blocking tools. Family and peer support was also emphasized.

From the results, the researchers suggest that recovery from PG is a nonlinear, socially embedded, and motivationally sustained journey. The cognitive-behavioural model suggests the importance of addressing gambling-related irrational beliefs early in intervention. The transtheoretical model of change suggests that recovery is nonlinear with turning points and relapses. Self-determination theory proposes three psychological needs that support motivation for change: autonomy (i.e., being

in control of one's actions and having choices), competence (i.e., feeling capable of achieving goals), and relatedness (i.e., social connections). Long-term recovery can be sustained when interventions reinforce these psychological needs.

How you can use this research

The results provide insights into lived experiences of PG and can inform policy makers and clinicians.

About the researchers

Marla Royne Stafford is affiliated with the International Gaming Institute, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, NV, USA. **Raja Mallina** is affiliated with the Lee Business School, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, NV, USA. **Matt Zarb-Cousin** is affiliated with Gamban, Essex, United Kingdom. **Kenneth Martz** is affiliated with the Pennsylvania Association of Addictions Professionals, Eagleville, PA, USA. **Robert Minnick** is affiliated with Gambling Addiction Recovery Content Creator, ODAAT Gambling Awareness Blackwood, Blackwood, NJ, USA. For more information about this study, please contact Marla Royne Stafford at Marla.Stafford@unlv.edu.

Citation

Stafford, M. R., Mallina, R., Zarb-Cousin, M., Martz, K., & Minnick, R. (2026). Lived experiences of recovering and recovered gamblers: A sentiment and thematic analysis. *Journal of Gambling Studies*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10899-026-10492-5>

Study Funding

This study was funded by AMZ Limited.

About Greo Evidence Insights

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