

A review of the prevalence of ADHD and autism among adults experiencing gambling-related harm

What this research is about

Gambling can cause financial, interpersonal, social, and emotional harms. It may also lead to difficulties in work and study and negatively affect physical health. Problem gambling may be associated with attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and autism. Studies have found that ADHD adults are more likely to engage in problem gambling compared to people who are neurotypical.

The association between ADHD and problem gambling may in part be due to the role of impulsivity, which refers to a tendency to act rashly without thinking of the consequences or when feeling strong emotions. Impulsivity is a key characteristic of ADHD and is also commonly associated with problem gambling.

Compared to ADHD, there is little research on the overlap between autism and problem gambling. However, high rates of co-occurring ADHD and autism suggest that autistic adults may be vulnerable to gambling-related harm. The current study is a systematic review of existing research to determine the prevalence of ADHD and autism among adults experiencing gambling-related harm.

What the researchers did

The researchers searched for relevant studies across four databases: MEDLINE, PsycINFO, CINAHL, and PubMed. To be included in the review, studies must have been published in peer-reviewed journals between 2010 and 2025. The researchers only considered observational studies (those with no interventions) that measured the prevalence of ADHD and autism among adults experiencing

What you need to know

Gambling can cause a variety of harms. Studies have found that adults with ADHD are at higher risk of gambling-related harm, compared to neurotypical adults. However, there is little research on the overlap between autism and gambling-related harm. The current study is a systematic review of existing research into the prevalence of autism and ADHD among adults experiencing gambling-related harm. Fourteen studies were included in the review. Only two of these studies also examined the co-occurrence of autism with gambling-related harm.

The combined data from these studies suggested that 24% of adults experiencing gambling-related harm also had ADHD. However, estimates varied between studies, and this number might be inflated due to the higher estimates in some studies. Due to the low number of studies including autistic adults, it is difficult to estimate the prevalence of autism among people experiencing gambling-related harm.

gambling harm. Studies must be written in English or have a readily available English translation.

To capture all levels of gambling-related harm, participants did not need to be formally diagnosed with problem gambling. They only needed to report negative consequences from gambling. Having ADHD or autism was classified as scoring 12 or higher on the Adult ADHD Self-Report Scale or scoring 29 or higher on the Autism Spectrum Quotient, or having a formal diagnosis.

The initial search, after the removal of duplicates, yielded 558 studies for screening. Of these, 32 were eligible for full-text review. A total of 14 studies were included in the final review. All studies involved ADHD participants, while only 2 studies also included autistic participants. Four studies took place in Japan, six in Europe, and the rest in Canada, USA, Australia, and Singapore. Most studies took place in clinical treatment settings. No studies were excluded due to risk of bias or low quality of data.

What the researchers found

Across the 14 studies, there were 751 participants who met the criteria for ADHD. Combined data from these studies suggested that about 24% of people reporting gambling-related harm also had ADHD. However, estimates varied significantly across studies. Additionally, a test for publication bias suggested that this number might be inflated and should be interpreted with caution.

Due to the low number of studies including autistic adults, it is difficult to estimate prevalence rate of autism among people experiencing gambling-related harm. One study found that 28 out of 96 participants experiencing gambling harm might also have autism. Another study, however, found only 9 such cases out of a total of 359 participants.

Problem gambling was measured in a variety of ways, including using the South Oaks Gambling Screen, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV or DSM-V), Problem Gambling Severity Index, and the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-10 or ICD-11). Some studies found that people with ADHD and problem gambling also had substance use disorders. One study reported a rate of 29.5% for current substance dependence, and a lifetime rate of 99.1%, among people with ADHD and problem gambling. However, another study found no such association.

How you can use this research

This review suggests that a large proportion of people with ADHD may also experience gambling-related harm. There is a need for more research into the overlap between ADHD, autism, and problem gambling.

About the researchers

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Citation

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About Greo Evidence Insights

Greo Evidence Insights is an independent, non-profit organization specializing in research, knowledge mobilization, and evaluation in the health and well-being sectors. Greo transforms research and insights into actionable strategies to prevent and reduce harm related to gambling, gaming, technology use, and substance use. To learn more about funding for Research Snapshots visit [our website](#).

