

# knowledge snapshot



## Gambling disorder and suicide: A scoping review

### What this article is about

Gambling disorder is a behavioural addiction. People with the disorder show persistent problematic gambling behaviour despite the harms. Harms from gambling may include financial, relationship, health, work/study, and legal problems. Moreover, people with gambling disorder have a higher risk of suicide. A number of studies have explored the link between gambling and suicidal behaviours. However, few have specifically explored the role of gambling in completed suicides. This article reviews and describes available research evidence regarding gambling and completed suicides. This article also suggests future directions for research.

### What was done?

The researchers did a scoping review. First, they searched for relevant articles using several academic databases. To be included in the review, articles must be published in a peer-reviewed journal and written in English or French. The main subject must be about both gambling and completed suicides.

The search occurred at the end of July 2021 and yielded 1,108 articles. The researchers removed duplicate articles and screened the titles and abstracts of the remaining ones. This step left 51 articles. These articles were subjected to a full-text reading. Finally, 18 articles were included in the review.

### What you need to know

#### *Study characteristics*

Of the 18 selected articles, 15 articles were original studies. The remaining three articles were a scoping review, a protocol, and a letter to the editor. All articles were published after 1997, although some

### Why is this article important?

This article reviews and describes research evidence regarding gambling and completed suicides. The researchers found 18 research articles relevant to the topic. A review of these studies shows that people with a history of gambling problems have a higher risk of suicide. Some risk factors for suicide include financial problems and co-occurring mental health problems. Participants in most studies were white middle-aged men. Most studies also had small numbers of participants and originated from only a few countries. The researchers made suggestions for future research directions.

studies used data dated back to 1990. Nine articles were published after 2010.

The country of origin was determined by the origin of the population studied. If the information was not available, it was determined by the affiliation of the first author. Seven articles originated from the United States, three were from Canada, and three were from Hong Kong, China. Two articles were from Australia. Two articles were each from Taiwan and Sweden.

Nine articles did not disclose information about their funding. The other articles received funding mainly from governmental bodies, foundations or institutional funds, and private corporations.

#### *Methods of study*

Six studies examined coroner reports, as well as psychological autopsies in some cases (e.g., interviews with persons close to the suicide victims). These studies aimed to determine the characteristics of

gambling-related suicide cases. Three of the studies were case-control studies, which either compared the gambling-related suicide cases to non-gambling related suicide cases or to living controls (i.e., people who gambled but did not commit suicide).

Seven studies were ecological studies that explored the link between gambling and suicide at the population level. One study was a cohort registry study. Two studies were a scoping review and a protocol. One study did not describe the methods used. One article was a letter to the editor.

### *Risk factors*

Four studies described the demographics of gambling-related suicide cases. In these studies, more than 80% of the suicide victims were white men with an average age of 40 to 45 years. The majority had financial problems before committing suicide.

A cohort registry study with over 2000 participants found that people with gambling disorder had a 15-fold higher risk of death from suicide. Depression was a predictor of suicide. Other studies also reported co-occurring mental health problems as a risk factor. Additionally, one study reported that gambling-related suicide victims experienced more hardship before their death than living controls. One study found that gambling-related suicide victims used mental health services less than other suicide victims.

The ecological studies aimed to examine environmental risk factors. Amount of money spent on gambling seemed to have a small effect on driving suicide. In one study, unemployment was a predictor of suicide after taking into account other risk factors.

### *Future research directions*

The majority of participants in most studies were men. The researchers suggested research on gambling-related suicides in women and other under-represented populations, such as LGBTQIA2+ and Indigenous Peoples. Larger studies with diverse populations from around the world are also needed.

The researchers also suggested studies to compare different subgroups of people who gamble. These subgroups may have distinct causes of their gambling

problems and require targeted treatment. The use of qualitative or mixed-methods research designs can provide a better understanding of the link between gambling and suicide. Moreover, future studies should disclose any funding received for their project.

### **Who is it intended for?**

This review is for researchers, gambling intervention providers, and health care professionals.

### **About the researchers**

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