

# knowledge snapshot



## A review of the global prevalence of help-seeking for problem gambling

### What this article is about

In many countries, various options are available to help people recover from gambling problems. These options may include professional services, non-professional help, and self-help. However, few people with problem gambling seek professional services. The prevalence of help-seeking for problem gambling is not well-established. Past studies provided estimates ranging from less than 1% to 34%. These estimates may have been influenced by the type of help being assessed and the study population, amongst other factors.

This article is a systematic review of international studies on help-seeking for gambling problems. Help-seeking was defined as “any intentional action to change gambling behaviours”. It included professional services (in person and distance-based), non-professional help (e.g., from family and friends), and self-help. The aim was to estimate the global prevalence of help-seeking in the general population and in subgroups of people at risk of problem gambling. Another aim was to identify factors that might explain the differences in prevalence estimates.

### What was done?

This review followed the guidelines of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA). The authors searched for relevant studies in the grey literature (e.g., government reports). They also searched for studies that were published in peer-reviewed journals. The search occurred between September and October 2021.

To be included in the review, studies had to meet the following criteria:

- Published in English since 2010.

### Why is this article important?

This article is a systematic review of international studies on help-seeking for problem gambling. Help-seeking included professional services (in person and distance-based), non-professional help (e.g., from family and friends), and self-help. The researchers found 24 studies that met their inclusion criteria. Globally, around 0.23% of the general population had sought help, either in the past 12 months or at some point in their lifetime. Prevalence estimates were higher in studies that looked at lifetime help-seeking than studies that looked at current help-seeking. Help-seeking was also higher among people with problem gambling and moderate-risk than people with low-risk. Around 1 in 5 people with problem gambling and 1 in 25 people with moderate-risk gambling had sought help for gambling-related problems.

- Included over half of the study participants who were aged 18 years or older.
- Used a sampling method that was representative of the study population to estimate the prevalence of gambling participation or problem gambling.
- Used a standardised measure to assess problem gambling, such as the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI).
- Provided data on the prevalence of help-seeking at the population level or by subgroups, either for current help-seeking or lifetime.

The authors found 24 studies that met all the criteria. They analysed information from these studies, as well as evaluated each study for risk of bias.

## What you need to know

### *Characteristics of included studies*

Seventeen studies were from the Australasian region (70.8%). Six studies were from North America (25.0%), and one study was from another region (4.2%). Most studies used one method of data collection, either via the phone (79.2%) or face-to-face interview (4.2%). Almost all studies used the PGSI to classify problem gambling (95.8%). Across the studies, the prevalence of problem gambling ranged from 0.4% to 1.9%, and of moderate-risk gambling from 1.1% to 5.1%.

Questions used to ask about help-seeking varied across studies. Over half of the studies assessed current help-seeking (54.2%), and over one-third assessed lifetime help-seeking (37.5%). A few studies assessed both timeframes (8.3%). Most studies asked only a sub-sample of participants about help-seeking (79.2%). For example, some studies asked only participants who were at risk of problem gambling or who had sought professional services.

Quality of the studies was evaluated with five items to assess risk of bias. Overall, there was a high risk of bias in the included studies.

### *Prevalence of help-seeking*

All 24 studies provided data that could be used to estimate the prevalence of help-seeking. Globally, around 0.23% of the general population had sought help in the past 12 months or at some point in their lifetime. Prevalence estimates varied widely across the studies. Studies that looked at lifetime help-seeking had higher estimates (0.50%, with a range from 0.35-0.71%) than studies that looked at current help-seeking (0.14%, with a range from 0.10–0.20%).

Help-seeking was more likely to occur among people with problem gambling (20.63%) and moderate-risk (3.73%) than people with low-risk (0.27%). This means around 1 in 5 people with problem gambling and 1 in 25 people with moderate-risk gambling had sought help. There was no evidence that prevalence estimates of help-seeking varied by gambling participation (past-year gambling vs ever gambling), region (Australasia vs North America), or type of help-seeking (professional services vs mixed options).

When the authors excluded studies with a high risk of bias in terms of selecting whom to ask about help-seeking, they found that the prevalence estimates of help-seeking were somewhat higher.

### Who is it intended for?

This review can inform future research and clinical practice. It also suggests a need to develop a valid help-seeking questionnaire for problem gambling.

### About the researchers

**Rimke Bijker** and **Natalia Booth** are affiliated with the School of Population Health at the University of Auckland in Auckland, New Zealand. **Stephanie S. Merkouris** and **Nicki A. Dowling** are affiliated with the School of Psychology at Deakin University in Geelong, Australia. **Simone N. Rodda** is affiliated with the Department of Psychology and Neuroscience at the Auckland University of Technology in Auckland, New Zealand. See the original article for full author affiliations. For more information, please contact Simone Rodda at [simone.rodde@aut.ac.nz](mailto:simone.rodde@aut.ac.nz).

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