

# research snapshot

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## Family conflict and financial problems as risk factors for suicide among gamblers

### What this research is about

Problem gambling is repetitive gambling behaviour that leads to negative consequences. These consequences may include financial problems and family conflict. The most serious consequences are thoughts about taking one's own life and suicide attempts. Gambling disorder is the most severe form of problem gambling.

Past research found several factors increased the risk of suicidal thoughts and attempts among people with gambling disorder. These factors included the severity of gambling problems and substance use. Financial problems also increased the risk of suicide.

Past research showed that social and family conflicts were related to financial problems and suicide among people with substance use disorder. These relationships have not been studied among people with gambling disorder. The current study explored the risk factors of suicidal thoughts and attempts, including financial problems and family conflict, among people with gambling disorder.

### What the researchers did

Participants were 202 adults with gambling disorder, who had sought help from the Michigan Problem Gambling Help-line from December 2008 to May 2010. All participants were referred to treatment when they called the helpline.

Participants reported their demographics, including age, gender, job status, race, and marital status. They reported gambling characteristics, such as the age they started gambling, the age their gambling problems started, preferred gambling type, and the amount of money spent and lost in the past month.

### What you need to know

This study examined the risk factors of suicide among adults who had sought help from a problem gambling help-line. Female gender, greater financial problems, and greater family conflict increased the risk of thoughts of suicide and suicide attempts among people with gambling disorder. The relationship between financial problems and suicidal thoughts/attempts was influenced by family conflict. That is, greater financial problems resulted in more family conflict among people with gambling disorder. Greater family conflict led to increased risk of suicidal thoughts/attempts. These findings suggest that family conflict may be important to address in people with gambling disorder who are experiencing financial problems.

The National Opinion Research Center Diagnostic Screen for Gambling Problems based on DSM-IV criteria (NODS) was used to assess gambling disorder in one's lifetime and in the past year.

Participants were also asked about experiencing financial problems due to gambling in the past year, including borrowing from credit cards, borrowing from friends or family, borrowing from other sources, difficulty paying household bills, using savings or equity, and filing for bankruptcy. Participants reported family conflict due to gambling, including spousal conflict, physical abuse, and neglect of family. Finally, participants were asked if they had thoughts about taking their own life or attempted suicide because of gambling in the past year.

The researchers analyzed differences in characteristics between participants who reported any thoughts of suicide or suicide attempts to participants with no suicidal thoughts or attempts. They also examined the relationship between financial problems, family conflicts, and suicidal thoughts and attempts.

### What the researchers found

Among the participants, 5.9% reported a suicide attempt and 27.7% reported thinking about suicide in the past year. The majority of participants (90%) reported a history of anxiety and/or depression due to gambling.

Women were more likely than men to report thinking about suicide and/or suicide attempts. Participants with recent suicidal thoughts or attempts had more severe gambling problems than those with no suicidal thoughts or attempts. They also reported greater financial problems and more family conflict than those without suicidal thoughts or attempts. This included conflict with a spouse or family, physical abuse of family, and neglect of family due to gambling.

The relationship between financial problems and recent suicidal thoughts or attempts was mediated by family conflict. This means that financial problems among people with gambling disorder led to family conflict. In turn, family conflict led to increased suicidal thoughts or attempts.

### How you can use this research

This study is useful to gambling treatment providers and clinicians. Treatment providers and clinicians could consider the level of family conflict a person with gambling disorder is experiencing when assessing suicide risk. Treatment providers could also consider interventions that address family conflict, such as Couples Therapy. Future research could further explore the risk of suicide among people with gambling disorder.

### About the researchers

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