

knowledge snapshot



Rates of problem gambling and gambling disorder among people experiencing homelessness

What this article is about

Homelessness is an important social and public health issue. Previous research has found that people who experience homelessness are more likely to also experience gambling problems. Gambling problems may include gambling disorder and problem gambling. Gambling disorder refers to clinically relevant gambling problems. Problem gambling is often used to also include subclinical levels of gambling problems.

The researchers did a systematic review of research studies on homelessness and gambling problems. They wanted to understand how common problem gambling and gambling disorder are among people experiencing homelessness.

What was done?

The researchers followed the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines. The researchers used keywords to search scientific databases. The databases included Medline, Embase, and PsychINFO. They also looked through the reference lists of included articles and other major publications. The researchers searched the databases for articles published before May 2021.

The researchers included studies that: 1) provided a prevalence estimate of problem gambling and/or gambling disorder; 2) included a sample of people experiencing homelessness; 3) used a standardized diagnostic instrument for evaluating problem gambling or gambling disorder among participants. The researchers considered all articles regardless of the language they were published in. But studies which only involved subpopulations were not included

Why is this article important?

Previous research has found that people who experience homelessness are more likely to also experience gambling problems. The authors did a systematic review to understand how common problem gambling and gambling disorder are among people experiencing homelessness. They searched the databases Medline, Embase, and PsychINFO for studies that met the inclusion criteria. Eight articles from five countries were included in the review. The eight studies reported information on 1938 participants. Rates of problem gambling and gambling disorder ranged from 11.3% to 31.3%. High rates of subclinical problem gambling were reported (11.6–54.4%). The review shows that at least one in ten people experiencing homelessness also experiences problem gambling or gambling disorder.

in this review (e.g., people with mental disorders experiencing homelessness, specific age ranges).

This search returned 310 studies. The researchers screened the title and abstract of each study. They removed 295 articles for not being relevant. The researchers then looked at the full text of the remaining articles. They found that only 8 articles met the inclusion criteria.

The researchers noted the following from each of the included studies: study location, year that the study occurred, assessment used to diagnose problem gambling/gambling disorder, recruitment strategy, sampling method, and information on mental illnesses. They also noted the average age, gender,

sample size (i.e., number of participants), and number of cases of problem gambling/gambling disorder.

The researchers examined each included study for risk of bias (low risk, moderate risk, high risk). Half of the included studies were rated as low risk. Half were rated as moderate risk of bias.

What you need to know

The eight studies were published between 2011 and 2021. They were from five different countries, including one in Japan, one in Poland, and two each in Canada, the US, and the UK. Together, these studies included information on 1938 participants experiencing homelessness. Information on gender was provided for 1527 (77%) participants. Most (77.2%) identified as male and 22.8% identified as female. On average, participants were 46 years old.

The studies used different assessments to diagnose problem gambling/gambling disorder. Five studies used assessments that were based on different versions of DSM criteria. These included the Computerized Gambling Assessment Module (C-GAM), the NORC Diagnostic Screen for Gambling Disorders (NODS), and the South Oaks Gambling Screen (SOGS). Three studies used the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI).

Rates of clinical problem gambling and gambling disorder among people experiencing homelessness ranged from 11.3% to 31.3%. But the four studies with a low risk of bias found lower rates ranging from 11.3% to 23.6%. Six studies found that between 11.6% and 56.4% of participants showed subclinical at-risk gambling behaviour.

This review shows that at least one in ten people who are homeless experiences clinically significant problem gambling and gambling disorder.

Who is it intended for?

Social support and health care service providers can use this research to implement models for early detection and treatment of gambling problems among people who are homeless. This review can also inform future research.

About the researchers

Karl Deutscher, Stefan Gutwinski, Felix Bempohl, and **Stefanie Schreiter** are affiliated with the Department of Psychiatry and Neurosciences, Charité at the Universitätsmedizin Berlin, Corporate Member of Freie Universität Berlin and Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, and Berlin Institute of Health in Berlin, Germany. **Henrietta Bowden-Jones** is affiliated with the National Problem Gambling Clinic in London, UK; the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Cambridge in Cambridge, UK; and the Faculty of Brain Sciences at University College London in London, UK. **Seena Fazel** is affiliated with the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Oxford and the Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust in Oxford, UK. For more information about this study, please contact Karl Deutscher at karl.deutscher@charite.de.

Citation

Deutscher, K., Gutwinski, S., Bempohl, F., Bowden-Jones, H., Fazel, S., & Schreiter, S. (2022). The prevalence of problem gambling and gambling disorder among homeless people: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Gambling Studies*. Advance online publication.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10899-022-10140-8>

Study funding

Open Access funding was enabled and organized by Projekt DEAL. The authors of this article did not receive any funds for this research.

About Greo

Greo has partnered with the Knowledge Mobilization Unit at York University to produce Research Snapshots. Greo is an independent knowledge translation and exchange organization with almost two decades of international experience in generating, synthesizing, and mobilizing research into action across the health and wellbeing sectors. Greo helps organizations improve their strategies, policies, and practices by harnessing the power of evidence and stakeholder insight.

Learn more about Greo by visiting greo.ca or emailing info@greo.ca.

