

knowledge snapshot



A review of the prevalence of mental health disorders among treatment-seeking problem gamblers

What this article is about

Past research consistently finds problem gambling to be associated with a range of psychiatric conditions. These include alcohol, substance use, mood, anxiety and other impulse control disorders. Studies about the co-occurrence of psychiatric conditions in problem gamblers usually focus on individuals living in the community. People who seek gambling treatment may experience more severe gambling problems and more intense mental health problems than non-treatment seeking problem gamblers. Also, estimates of the prevalence of co-occurring psychiatric conditions vary widely across studies.

This article reviewed studies that estimated the prevalence of psychiatric disorders in treatment-seeking problem gamblers. A meta-analysis was performed to assess how varied the studies were in their estimates and risk of bias. In general, meta-analysis combines data from multiple studies to produce a more complete picture of the area of research.

What was done?

The researchers searched several electronic databases for relevant studies. They also searched gambling journals not indexed in the databases, the reference lists of included studies, and several review articles.

The studies had to meet the following criteria to be included: (1) the sample included adults recruited from problem gambling treatment services or clinical trials for problem gambling; (2) the study provided an estimate of the prevalence of at least one psychiatric condition; (3) the study was available in English; and, (4) the study was published in a peer-reviewed journal between January 1990 - August

Why is this article important?

This article reviewed studies that estimated the prevalence of co-occurring psychiatric disorders in people seeking treatment for gambling problems. The authors conducted a meta-analysis to assess how varied these studies were in their estimates and risk of bias. Findings from 36 studies indicated that about three-quarters of treatment-seeking problem gamblers had current and lifetime co-occurring disorders. Notably, a fifth of people who sought help for gambling problems had a problem with alcohol use. Also, a fifth suffered from a mood disorder, such as depression. Studies varied widely in their estimates for many disorders. This review highlights the need for gambling treatment services to routinely screen and provide treatment plans that take into account co-occurring disorders. Likewise, mental health and addiction service providers should screen for problem gambling and provide appropriate treatment.

2011. A total of 36 studies, published in 39 articles, were included. The researchers extracted data from the studies to perform a meta-analysis.

What you need to know

Results from the 36 studies showed that 74.8% of people seeking treatment for problem gambling had another current psychiatric condition. Also, 75.5% of people seeking treatment for problem gambling had a lifetime psychiatric condition.

Substance use disorders: Overall, 22.2% of people seeking treatment for problem gambling had a current substance use disorder. These included 56.4%

with nicotine dependency; 18.2% with alcohol abuse; 15.2% with alcohol dependence; and 11.5% with cannabis use disorder.

Anxiety disorders: About 17.6% of treatment-seeking problem gamblers had a current anxiety disorder. These included 14.9% with social phobia; 14.4% with generalized anxiety disorder; 13.7% with panic disorder; 12.3% with post-traumatic stress disorder; and 8.2% with obsessive-compulsive disorder.

Mood disorders: About 23.1% had a current mood disorder. These included 29.9% with major depression; 8.8% with bipolar disorder; and 6.7% with dysthymic disorder (a chronic form of depression).

The studies varied widely in their prevalence estimates for many co-occurring disorders; however, the researchers did not identify any consistent patterns for these differences. Subgroup analysis found lower rates of alcohol use disorder in pathological gamblers than problem gamblers. Also, studies conducted in the US reported lower rates of alcohol use disorder than studies done in Europe.

The estimates of co-occurring psychiatric conditions among treatment-seeking problem gamblers were not consistently higher than those from a similar review with community problem gamblers. This suggests that problem gamblers with co-occurring psychiatric conditions may seek treatment at mental health or addiction services rather than at gambling treatment services. It may also suggest that people are more aware of mental health or addiction services and more likely to access those services.

Who is it intended for?

This review is intended for treatment providers. Gambling treatment providers should routinely screen for co-occurring psychiatric conditions in individuals seeking treatment for gambling problems. They could provide tailored treatment plans for clients who screen positive for co-occurring problems. Likewise, mental health and addiction service providers should routinely screen for problem gambling and provide appropriate resources and referrals.

About the researchers

Nicki A. Dowling is an Associate Professor of Psychology at Deakin University in Australia. **Sean Cowlshaw** is with the School of Social and Community Medicine at Bristol University in the UK. **Stephanie S. Merkouris** is with the School of Psychology at Deakin University. **Alun C. Jackson** is with the Melbourne Graduate School of Education at the University of Melbourne. **Kate L. Francis** is now with the Clinical Epidemiology and Biostatistics Unit at Murdoch Children's Research Institute. **Darren R. Christensen** is the chair of the Alberta Gambling Research Institute at the University of Lethbridge in Canada. For more information about this study, please contact nicki.dowling@deakin.edu.au.

Citation

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Keywords

Gambling, systematic review, meta-analysis, psychiatric disorders, co-morbidity

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