

# knowledge snapshot



## A review of family-focused interventions for addictions

### What this article is about

Problem gambling shares many similarities with substance use and alcohol use problems. For example, they can contribute to health problems, financial problems, discrimination, and isolation. The DSM-5 also classifies gambling disorder in the same category as substance use disorders.

The family members of someone with alcohol, substance, or gambling problems can also experience harm. Harm can include mental distress, increased conflict, and financial issues. However, few treatments for alcohol, substance, and gambling problems include family members. Research suggests that involving families in treatments can be beneficial. However, more research is needed to understand the best ways to involve families in treatments.

This study reviews current research about family-focused treatments for alcohol, substance, and gambling problems. It aims to understand what family interventions have been used and what treatment gaps still exist.

### What was done?

The researchers explored studies about family-focused treatments for alcohol, substance, and gambling problems. To find relevant studies, they searched three online databases: MEDLINE, PsycINFO, and Social Services Abstracts. They also searched for studies from social work journals that focus on addictions.

The researchers only included studies that focused on family involvement in treatments for alcohol, substances, or gambling. Additionally, the research articles had to be written in English or French and

### Why is this article important?

Gambling, alcohol, and substance use problems harm individuals as well as their families. This article reviews research on family-focused interventions for gambling, alcohol, and substance use problems. It shows that few studies have looked at family-focused interventions for problem gambling. Additionally, few studies try to understand how to adapt interventions to people of different ages, cultures, or socioeconomic backgrounds. Overall, this review shows that involving families in interventions benefits the person with the addiction as well as their family members. However, more research is needed to address several gaps in our knowledge.

published since the year 2000. They also searched for additional articles in the reference lists of articles that met these criteria.

In total, the researchers found 95 relevant studies. They analyzed the articles to identify the key themes. They also recorded the type of addictions and type of interventions studied, as well as the goals of the interventions. They also recorded whether the studies or interventions took culture or diversity into consideration.

### What you need to know

Most of the studies focused on alcohol (43%) or other substances (48%). Only 8% of studies focused on gambling. Thus, more research is needed on family-focused treatments for problem gambling. Additionally, less than 20% of studies used qualitative methods such as interviews or focus groups. More

qualitative research could help researchers better understand the lived experiences of families suffering from addictions.

The researchers grouped the interventions from the studies into three categories. The first category was interventions for couples (38% of the studies). These studies looked at the effects of treatment on the addiction as well as the effects on relationship functioning. Almost two-thirds of these interventions aimed to increase communication and decrease conflict in couples.

The second category was interventions for families that included the person with the addiction (34% of the studies). These focused on family members supporting their loved one who is suffering from the addiction.

The third category was interventions for families that did not include the person with the addiction (24% of the studies). These interventions focused on improving the quality of family relationships and helping family members cope with the problems. They also aimed to increase family members' understanding of the addiction.

Only seven studies looked at how family interventions could be adapted to different cultures. Additionally, no studies looked at how they could be adapted for people of different ages. Only one study looked at how socioeconomic status relates to the intervention. Finally, only two studies looked at how interventions could help people in the LGBTQ+ community.

Overall, most studies found that family involvement in addiction treatment was beneficial. Specifically, it improved relationship satisfaction, family function, and coping skills for family members. It also decreased distress for the person with the addiction and reduced their chance of relapse. Studies recommended that families need more than one treatment option to meet their specific needs. Additionally, many studies recommended that service providers receive more training on how to provide family-focused care. Finally, more studies could focus on adapting interventions to different cultures or diverse groups.

## Who is it intended for?

This review is intended for other researchers, policy makers, educators, and service providers. It reviews the current research to show what gaps exist in our policies, services, and knowledge. It is important to examine policies that shape service provisions and family-centred care.

## About the researchers

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## About Gambling Research Exchange (GREO)

Gambling Research Exchange (GREO) has partnered with the Knowledge Mobilization Unit at York University to produce Research Snapshots. GREO is an independent knowledge translation and exchange organization that aims to eliminate harm from gambling. Our goal is to support evidence-informed decision making in safer gambling policies, standards, and practices. The work we do is intended for researchers, policy makers, gambling regulators and operators, and treatment and prevention service providers.

Learn more about GREO by visiting [greo.ca](http://greo.ca) or emailing [info@greo.ca](mailto:info@greo.ca).

