

# knowledge snapshot



## A systematic review of qualitative studies on gambling-related suicide and suicidality

### What this article is about

Gambling is linked to harmful consequences. One serious harm is suicide. Recent studies have found that suicidality is high among those who gamble a lot. Suicidality refers to thinking about and planning for suicide, as well as suicide attempts. Most of these studies have used quantitative data.

In this article, the researchers reviewed qualitative studies on gambling-related suicide and suicidality. They aimed to identify the role of gambling in suicidality. As well, the researchers looked for what kind of support people who are suicidal would need.

### What was done?

The researchers conducted a systematic review of qualitative studies. First, they searched for relevant studies using seven scientific databases: Scopus, PubMed, Ebscohost, ProQuest, Core, OpenAire, and Web of Science. They also searched Google Scholar.

The researchers focused on academic, peer-reviewed research. Therefore, they did not include the grey literature (e.g., reports), anecdotal evidence, or quantitative research. Research included in this review had to present qualitative evidence on gambling-related suicide, suicidality, or self-harm (e.g., interviews, case studies, and coroner's reports). Because there was not a lot of qualitative research on this topic, the researchers also included studies that focused more generally on suicidality or on gambling harms. But these studies still had to include evidence related to gambling. All studies published by May 2022 could be included in the review.

The researchers used an adapted version of the PRISMA guidelines. Their initial search found a total of

### Why is this article important?

Gambling is linked to harmful consequences. One serious harm is suicide. The researchers reviewed qualitative studies on gambling-related suicide and suicidality (e.g., interviews and case reports). They aimed to identify the role of gambling in suicidality. A total of 20 academic, peer-reviewed qualitative papers were reviewed. Gambling was found to be related to suicidal behaviour through (1) indebtedness and (2) shame. Suicide was also found to be related to mental health conditions, personality traits, and difficult life conditions. But these factors might also appear as a result from gambling. In some cases, treatment was effective to prevent suicidality. But indebtedness and shame might prevent people from seeking help.

1,224 records. Then, the researchers reviewed the titles to remove duplicates and unrelated studies. A total of 918 studies were excluded at this stage.

The researchers read the abstracts of the remaining studies to make sure that they were relevant. Articles were excluded if they (1) only included quantitative evidence; (2) did not include empirical evidence (i.e., did not collect and analyze data); (3) were written in a language other than English, French, or Spanish; (4) did not include evidence about gambling-related suicide, suicidality, or self-harm; (5) focused on the suicidality of concerned significant others rather than those who gambled (e.g., family members); and (6) could not be located. A total of 259 articles were removed at this stage.

The researchers then read the remaining 47 articles to see if they met the inclusion criteria. The final sample

included 20 research articles. These included studies came from different countries, including countries in Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia, and North America.

The researchers analyzed the studies using three categories: (1) contribution of gambling to suicide or suicidality; (2) confounding factors (i.e., factors that might be associated with both gambling and suicidality); and (3) treatment or recovery.

## What you need to know

### (1) Contribution of gambling to suicide or suicidality

In most of the included studies (95%), gambling or gambling-related harms were noted as the main reason for suicidality. The researchers noted that most studies discussed two main ways that gambling could lead to suicide: (a) indebtedness and money loss, and (b) shame. Gambling-related debt or significant loss of money was often discussed as a major reason for suicide or suicidality. Shame was also described as a cause for suicide or suicidality. Gambling either created or worsened feelings of shame and guilt. In turn, this led to suicide or suicide attempt.

### (2) Confounding factors

Of the 20 studies included in this review, most (70%) also discussed other factors or diagnoses that could have also led to suicidal behaviour. These factors included co-occurring mental health issues (e.g., depression and alcohol/drug abuse), personality types (e.g., impulsive personality traits, introversion, and low self-esteem), and difficult life situations (e.g., poverty, unemployment, family history of suicide or trauma, and interpersonal problems). Co-occurring mental health issues and difficult life situations might have occurred before or after gambling had started.

### (3) Treatment and recovery

Only eight studies discussed treatment for and recovery from suicidality. The main reason that people sought help was because they were at an extremely low point in their lives. The more comprehensive and specialized the treatment and support, the better the results. Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), often used alongside other therapeutic approaches, was sometimes helpful. Treatments that only used

medicine were not as effective. Treatment was not effective if people often missed appointments.

## Who is it intended for?

This review is intended to inform future research on gambling-related suicide. Also, this review could inform public health approaches to shift the blame for gambling-related harms and indebtedness from individuals to broader societal and commercial conditions.

## About the researchers

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## Citation

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