

knowledge snapshot



A review of interventions aimed at the affected others of addictions

What this article is about

Substance-use addictions and behavioural addictions share many similarities. As a result, the DSM-5 places them in the same category. This category includes alcohol use, illicit drug use, and gambling disorder. Many people experience harm from someone else's addictive disorder. For example, 2 to 19% of people are affected by someone else's problem gambling. These people are called "affected others". Affected others can experience emotional, relationship, health, and financial harms because of the addiction.

Some interventions target affected others of those with addictions. Some of these interventions aim to help the affected others directly. Others aim to help affected others support the person with the addiction. This paper reviewed the effectiveness of psychosocial interventions for affected others of addiction. Specifically, it looked at how interventions help the affected others, the people with the addiction, and the relationship between them.

What was done?

The researchers searched academic databases for articles on affected other interventions for alcohol use, substance use, gambling, or gaming. These databases were Medline, PsycInfo, CINAHL, and EMBASE. They also searched Google for relevant grey literature. They used search terms related to addiction, affected others, interventions, and controlled trials.

The authors included articles that:

- Evaluated a psychosocial intervention for affected others.
- Included participants who were 18+ years old.

Why is this article important?

Many people experience harm from someone else's addiction. These people are called "affected others". Some interventions target affected others directly. This article reviewed studies of the effectiveness of interventions targeted at affected others. The authors found 22 relevant articles. About 70% of these studies focused on interventions for alcohol-related harms, while 20% focused on gambling harms and 10% focused on illicit drugs. Many of these studies had medium some concerns to or high risk of bias. Overall, the results showed that affected other interventions appeared to increase life satisfaction and coping skills and decrease depressive symptoms for affected others. They also appeared to decrease relationship discord and help get the people with the addiction to start treatment. These outcomes were measured right after the intervention finished. No intervention effects were observed at short-term follow-up. More research is needed to understand longer-term outcomes.

- Compared a treatment group to a control group who did not receive treatment.
- Measured outcomes for the affected others, the people with the addiction, or their relationship functioning.

For each article, the authors recorded the type of intervention used, the outcomes, and the addiction it targeted. They also used a standardised measure to classify each study as having a low risk of bias, some concerns or high risk of bias.

The authors compared the effectiveness of different interventions to control on the following outcomes:

- Affected others' depression, anxiety, life satisfaction, distress, and coping style
- Frequency of addictive behaviour and whether the people with the addiction began treatment
- Relationship discord between them

The authors looked at the intervention's effectiveness right after the intervention ended, as well as later on. Finally, they tested if intervention effectiveness differed based on various clinical factors, such as addiction type, mode of delivery, and the risk of bias of the study.

What you need to know

The researchers found 22 articles, covering 20 different studies, that met their inclusion criteria. Most studies (70%) evaluated affected other interventions for alcohol use. Meanwhile, 20% evaluated interventions for gambling and 10% for illicit substance use. There was no study on gaming. Most interventions (65%) only targeted affected others whose partner/spouse had the addiction. Almost all studies evaluated the affected others' mood and functioning. Three-quarters of the studies evaluated outcomes for the people with the addiction and just over half evaluated relationship functioning.

Half of the studies had a high risk of bias and half had some concerns. The risk of bias came from changes to the intended intervention, measurement of the outcome, missing outcome data, etc.

Most studies evaluated outcomes right after the intervention finished. In these studies, affected others who received the intervention had fewer depressive symptoms and less relationship discord than those in the control group. They also had higher life satisfaction and better coping skills. Finally, the intervention resulted in the people with the addiction being more likely to attend treatment.

A few studies looked at short-term outcomes at 4 to 11 months after the intervention finished. These studies did not show improved outcomes at the

follow up. There were not enough studies looking at longer-term outcomes to analyze the results.

Who is it intended for?

The authors suggest researchers study the longer-term outcomes of affected other interventions. They also suggest doing more research on interventions for behavioural addictions, such as gambling disorder.

About the researchers

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