RESEARCH QUESTIONS
How do gambling behaviours evolve over the life span? Does treatment-seeking behaviour differ according to the evolution of gambling behaviours?

PURPOSE
Pathological gambling can impact financial, legal, professional, family and mental health difficulties, such as anxiety, depression and dependence disorders. There is, however, no clear picture of the evolution of change in gambling that occurs from being exposed to a gambling environment to becoming a problem gambler. This study evaluated gambling behaviours and their evolution over the life span. This study also documented treatment-seeking behaviours among different groups of participants and evaluated the adequacy of the treatment they received.

HYPOTHESIS
Different trajectories of gambling behaviours over the lifespan would be identified based on clinical differences between groups. There would be a deficit in treatment with regard to mental health problems, independent of the gambling trajectory.

PARTICIPANTS
Participants were 86 gamblers (48% males) aged 20 to 79 years.

PROCEDURE
Participants were recruited via a variety of methods including ads in newspapers and contact with treatment providers. Participants were interviewed via standardized semi-structured questionnaires regarding mental health, gambling-related behaviours and problems, and treatment-seeking.

MAIN OUTCOME MEASURES
Problem gambling was assessed via Module K of the SCID and the SOGS. Gambling behaviour across the life course was gathered via a life calendar that mapped gambling-related events. The presence of mental health disorders was assessed via the SCID. Clinical case histories were drafted according to SCID I and II information on treatment-seeking behaviour and treatment services received and then submitted to panels who categorized them according to four levels of service delivery: front-line physicians: GPs and other doctors; front-line health and social services; specialized services; and volunteer services.

KEY RESULTS
The results indicated three groups of gambling behaviours over the life course. One group was exposed to gambling early on during their teenage years, became recreational gamblers around their mid-twenties, and became pathological gamblers by the end of their forties or early fifties. A second group was exposed to gambling later on in life with recreational gambler behaviours during their forties and rapidly developing pathological gambling behaviours during their fifties. The third group was exposed to recreational gambling later in life and went on to develop pathological gambling problems mostly after their retirement (around 60 or 70 years old). During the last 6 months, 23% of participants suffered from mood disorders, 10% from abuse and addiction disorders and 46% from a pathological gambling disorder. A total of 62% of participants had at least one mental health disorder and 27% had two or more disorders. In the last month, between 14% and 23% of participants consulted specialized services for mental health and addiction problems and between 38% and 50% consulted in the last year. Over the life course, between 71% and 83% of participants consulted specialized services compared with 33–55% who consulted frontline social services. Overall, 46–64% accessed services from volunteer or non-profit organizations over the course of their lives. Group 2 consulted the front-line medical services more often than the two other groups prior to last year and during life course.

LIMITATIONS
The sample was small and results may not generalize to the whole population of gamblers. The interviews were long and may have been subject to recall bias.

**CONCLUSIONS**

Overall, the results suggest a variety of trajectories for the development of gambling disorders. They also suggest a high prevalence of co-morbid disorders, especially the presence of mood disorders coupled with abuse and addiction disorders.

**KEYWORDS:** gambling trajectory, lifespan, comorbidity

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