

# knowledge snapshot



## A systematic review on how parental problem gambling affects children's well-being

### What this article is about

Problem gambling is a mental disorder with a low percentage of people affected. However, problem gambling can harm other people aside from the person who struggles with it. Children of a parent with problem gambling may struggle with their mood and behaviour. They may also be neglected or experience family violence. Current research suggests that children may experience considerable harm resulting from a parent's problem gambling. There have not been any systematic reviews of the research literature on the well-being of children whose parents have problem gambling. The purpose of this study was to conduct a systematic review on this area of research.

### What was done?

The authors wanted to find research articles that provided data on the well-being, family, relationships, and physical or mental health of children who had a parent with problem gambling. The study participants should be the parents who gambled, their intimate partners, and/or their children. Children did not have to live with the parent with problem gambling, did not have to be of full-blood relation (i.e., could be a step-child), and included adult children as well. All studies needed to measure parental problem gambling and its impact on child or family well-being. Studies were excluded if they were a review, did not include original data, and did not separate parental gambling or children's well-being from other people's gambling or well-being. Studies must also be published in English in a peer-reviewed journal by January 2021.

The authors searched the databases PsycINFO, CINAHL, Medline, and Scopus for articles that met their criteria. Their search strategy combined words

### Why is this article important?

Children who have a parent with problem gambling can be subjected to psychological, familial, financial, physical, and behavioural harms. They may also experience violence. This systematic review synthesized the literature on how children's well-being is affected by a parent's problem gambling. Thirty-five studies were identified. Most studies reported that children were directly or indirectly affected by a parent's problem gambling. Harms included a greater risk of mental health problems, financial stress, conduct problems, child abuse, and poor relationship with the parent with problem gambling.

related to gambling, children, and parents. They also examined references lists of studies that met their criteria to find additional articles.

### What you need to know

The authors identified 35 articles that met their inclusion criteria. Fourteen studies (40%) reported on psychological problems of children. Of these, five studies reported on psychological problems directly related to parental gambling, including emotional distress and depression. A further eight studies reported on psychological problems indirectly related to parental gambling. There was also evidence that children of parents with problem gambling were at greater risk of suicide and self-harm. Six studies provided qualitative evidence, such as mentions of profound feelings of unhappiness and distress.

Seventeen studies reported on the family relationships of children. Three studies reported that familial problems were directly related to parental gambling, including loss of contact and family breakup. Five studies reported on familial problems indirectly related to parental gambling. For example, one study found that problem gambling families were twice as likely to rate their family functioning as unhealthy compared to non-problem gambling families. There were nine studies that included qualitative evidence, suggesting that gambling parents and their children frequently have poor relationships.

Nine studies reported on violence against children. One study found that 8% of people with gambling problems had been violent with their children in the past year. Another seven studies found indirect evidence that violence against children was related to parental gambling. Three studies reported that people with gambling problems had a lifetime prevalence rate of child abuse ranging from 17% to 43%. Three studies reported a part-year rate between 7% to 18%. One qualitative study described child abuse and neglect in problem gambling families.

Seven studies examined child behavioural problems. Six studies found indirect evidence that parental gambling contributed to children's behavioural problems. These studies found that children of parents with a gambling problem had problems with crime, substance uses, inattention/hyperactivity, and conduct disorder. The remaining study was qualitative and described conduct problems, such as excessive fighting, running away, and school absence.

Nine studies looked at financial problems. The majority of these studies reported that children experienced financial stress and/or harm related to parental gambling. Children's physical health was examined in three studies. There was some evidence of worse physical health in children who experienced parental problem gambling.

## Who is it intended for?

This study is intended for gambling researchers and clinicians. This study found that children can be

harmed in many ways because of a parent's gambling. More research is required on the mechanism of this relationship. Clinicians should seek to assess and treat children affected by problem gambling.

## About the researchers

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