

# research snapshot

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## The experiences of people attending a gambling self-help group in Norway

### What this research is about

Gambling disorder is a severe form of problem gambling (PG). PG is repetitive gambling behaviour that leads to negative consequences for the person with PG and their family and friends. Many people with PG are ashamed of their PG and do not seek treatment. Self-help groups are a type of gambling intervention that people may be more willing to attend. People in self-help groups help each other overcome PG instead of getting help from clinicians. This may reduce the amount of shame people feel about their PG. Also, people determine when and how often they attend their self-help group.

There are two main organizations who run self-help groups in Norway. Gamblers Anonymous is a well-known organization that has self-help groups for people all over the world. It uses a specific 12-step program to help people overcome their PG. Gambling Addiction Norway does not follow a 12-step program or a specific approach to help people overcome their PG. It is not based on any religious beliefs. Thus, people who are not religious may prefer self-help groups like Gambling Addiction Norway because they can share their own beliefs and recovery strategies.

How involved people are in self-help groups may depend on the group's format and cultural beliefs. In this study, the researchers explored people's experiences with the self-help groups run by Gambling Addiction Norway.

### What the researchers did

The researchers asked Gambling Addiction Norway to help them recruit participants for their study. The researchers contacted people who volunteered to participate in the study. They interviewed nine

### What you need to know

In this study, the researchers explored people's experiences with the Gambling Addiction Norway self-help groups. The researchers interviewed nine people with current or lifetime gambling disorder. They asked participants to describe their positive and negative experiences with being part of self-help groups. The researchers identified three main themes from the participants' responses. The first theme was related to having shared experiences and understanding. The second theme was about the self-help groups' structure and content. The third theme was about changes over time; participants' experiences with the self-help groups changed the longer they had attended the groups.

participants face-to-face. Only one participant was a woman. The researchers first screened participants for gambling disorder using criteria in the 5<sup>th</sup> edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders (DSM-5). Participants had current GD if they agreed with four or more GD criteria within the past year during the interview. Participants had lifetime GD if they agreed with four or more GD criteria within any 12-month period during their lifetime.

During the interviews, participants described what happened in the self-help groups. They also described their positive and negative experiences with being part of self-help groups. The researchers identified three main themes from their responses.

### What the researchers found

The first theme was 'shared narratives and understanding'. Participants thought it was helpful to

share their stories and goals during group meetings. Participants felt that people in the self-help groups understood what they were going through as they shared similar feelings and challenges. Participants trusted people in the self-help groups. They did not feel judged or alone with their problems. Many found it socially rewarding to help each other.

The second theme was 'keeping it relevant to problem gambling'. Some participants thought it was important to have specific PG topics to talk about at each meeting. Others disagreed and thought the meetings should be less structured so that people would feel more comfortable sharing their experiences. Generally, meetings could go from having more structure at one time to less structure at another time. Participants said they usually talked about the negative consequences of gambling. Many said that listening to other people's stories made them realize how serious their own problem was. They became more aware of how their gambling behaviour affects their family and friends. Participants also learned how to deal with their gambling problems by listening to others' stories.

The third theme was 'change over time'. Participants felt uncomfortable sharing their personal experiences when they first attended the self-help groups. They became more comfortable as they got to know people in the groups. The self-help group meetings reduced participants' urges to gamble and helped them stay away from gambling activities. Participants who were part of self-help groups for a longer time enjoyed helping newer group members. Several participants started to organize meetings and social events.

These results suggest that Gambling Addiction Norway helps members overcome their PG. Self-help groups may benefit people with PG if they give members information about PG, offer advice and support, and allow them to share coping strategies with each other. This means that self-help groups may not need to follow a specific, structured program.

### How you can use this research

Researchers can use this research to investigate whether the amount of help that members get in self-

help groups, the amount of gambling information shared at meetings, and the strength of relationships among members affect how likely they are to recover from PG. Future research can include more women. Prevention service providers can work with self-help groups to raise awareness of their services.

### 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.

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