

knowledge snapshot



An international review of the prevalence of gambling and homelessness

What this article is about

Gambling can cause many harms, including financial, emotional, and relationship harms. Severe financial harm can lead to homelessness. Many studies find a link between homelessness and gambling. However, the connection between them is not clear. For example, some research suggests that gambling can lead to homelessness. However, other research suggests being homeless may encourage someone to gamble to improve their financial situation.

Few studies have thoroughly examined the relationship between homelessness and gambling. For example, it is unclear how prevalent homelessness and gambling are. It is also unclear how often they co-occur (i.e., someone experiencing both homelessness and gambling harm). Additionally, many studies from different countries use different measures of homelessness and gambling behaviour and harms. As a result, it is often difficult to compare studies from different countries.

This study performed a systematic review of international research on homelessness and gambling. Specifically, it reviewed studies that measured the co-occurrence of homelessness and gambling.

What was done?

The researchers searched for peer-reviewed research articles that looked at the co-occurrence of gambling and homelessness. They included studies that looked at community samples as well as help-seeking groups. They searched for the articles in online databases. These databases were: CINAHL Plus, Cochrane Library, Embase, Ovid MEDLINE, PsycINFO, ProQuest Central, PubMed, Scopus, and Web of Science. The articles must be written in English.

Why is this article important?

This article reviewed 45 studies on the co-occurrence of gambling and homelessness from 12 different countries. These studies show that people who experience homelessness are less likely to gamble than the general population. However, they are more likely to gamble in harmful ways. Also, people who seek help for gambling are more likely to have experienced homelessness than the general population. So, gambling harm and homelessness often co-occur. However, the authors noted that many studies did not use consistent measures for gambling or homelessness. This makes it difficult to compare results across studies and to accurately estimate the prevalence of harmful gambling in persons experiencing homelessness.

Two researchers recorded information from each study. This included the methods and the main results of the study. They also assessed each study's risk of bias. For example, a study whose participants are not representative of the population of interest can be biased. The researchers then compared results across studies. They also compared the participants' characteristics across studies (e.g., country, gender and age, and help-seeking or part of the general community). They also looked at how the different studies measured gambling and homelessness.

What you need to know

The initial search found 917 articles and 45 met the review criteria. These 45 articles reported 54 prevalence estimates for the co-occurrence of gambling and homelessness. About 16% of the articles

had a high risk of bias, while the majority had some risk of bias.

These studies took place in 12 different countries. However, almost half of the studies were from the US. Additionally, most studies looked at help-seeking groups, such as those accessing homelessness or health services. Finally, male participants were more common than female participants in most studies.

Almost half of the studies did not use standardized measurements for gambling behaviour or harm. Studies that did use standardized measurements most commonly used the DSM-IV criteria, the South Oaks Gambling Screen (SOGS), or the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI). Studies that used the PGSI or SOGS often reported higher prevalence of harmful gambling than studies that used the DSM-IV criteria. These studies also reported more consistent estimates for the prevalence of harmful gambling than other studies.

Seventeen studies looked at gambling prevalence in persons experiencing homelessness. Meanwhile, 24 studies looked at *harmful* gambling prevalence in persons experiencing homelessness. Overall, these studies showed that gambling prevalence was lower in people experiencing homelessness than in the general population (29% vs. 60 to 80%). However, harmful gambling prevalence was higher in people experiencing homelessness than in the general population (17% vs. 1 to 7%). So, people experiencing homelessness are less likely to gamble, but they are more likely to gamble in a very harmful way.

Thirteen studies looked at the prevalence of homelessness in people who were seeking help for harmful gambling. These studies found homelessness was higher in people seeking help for gambling than in the general population (24% vs. <1%). Additionally, people with more severe harmful gambling experienced more serious homeless situations.

Who is it intended for?

This review is intended for service providers, policy makers, and researchers. The researchers suggest that people who provide services to those experiencing

homelessness should screen for harmful gambling and provide access to treatments. Additionally, researchers should use more consistent approaches to measure gambling and homelessness. This will help estimate the prevalence of harmful gambling and homelessness more accurately.

About the researchers

Brian Vandenberg and **Kerry O'Brien** are affiliated with the School of Social Sciences at Monash University in Victoria, Australia. **Charles Livingstone** is affiliated with the School of Public Health and Preventative Medicine at Monash University in Victoria, Australia. **Adrian Carter** is affiliated with the School of Psychological Sciences and Turner Institute for Brain and Mental Health at Monash University in Victoria, Australia. For more information about this study, please contact Brian Vandenberg at brian.vandenberg@monash.edu.

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