

# knowledge snapshot



## A review of current research on disordered gambling and comorbidity

### What this article is about

This review article summarizes current research on disordered gambling and associated mental health disorders. Disordered gambling occurs when individuals cannot control their urges to gamble, even though they experience a range of negative consequences. Past studies have shown that many individuals who have disordered gambling also have comorbid conditions. Comorbidity is the term used to describe the presence of two or more disorders in a patient. In the case of disordered gamblers, they tend to suffer from other mental health disorders, such as drug use and anxiety disorders.

There has been no review to date on existing studies examining comorbidity in disordered gambling. Moreover, treatment providers rarely focus on comorbid conditions while they are treating patients for disordered gambling. Thus, patients often go back and forth between treatment for gambling and treatment for other disorders. This approach is ineffective in helping patients recover. In this article, the authors provide a comprehensive review of published research on disordered gambling and comorbidity. They also identify research gaps and provide recommendations for future research.

### What was done?

The authors scanned the academic literature to find studies on disordered gambling and comorbid conditions. They also searched for grey literature on 33 websites. The majority of the chosen websites were from Canada, America, and Australia. The search was for eligible studies up to and including July 2016. The authors only included studies that assessed the severity of participants' disordered gambling and

### Why is this article important?

Past research has shown that individuals who have disordered gambling often have other mental health disorders. However, there is no detailed review of studies on comorbidity in disordered gambling within the past 20 years. The authors provide a review of existing studies on disordered gambling and comorbid disorders. They identify what research studies have been done so far and their findings. The authors also provide recommendations for future research topics and for improving clinical work.

comorbid conditions. They included all types of comorbid conditions and a broad range of study designs. They limited the studies to those published in English that had been peer reviewed. The authors found 251 articles that met their criteria.

Ten tables are included in the supplementary material. The tables list all included articles and relevant information including summaries of each study's results and conclusions.

### What you need to know

Most of the studies focused on prevalence rates, or the proportion of people in a population who have a disorder. These studies consistently showed that disordered gambling often occurs with other mental health disorders. The most common co-morbid disorders are substance use disorders, personality disorders, mood and, anxiety disorders. Participants tended to be from clinical populations (i.e., gamblers seeking treatment) or general populations. There were limited studies on older adults and high school

students. Most studies only discussed the statistical associations between disorders and did not explore why these associations occur.

Very few studies investigated the effectiveness of treating disordered gambling together with comorbid conditions, rather than treating them separately. There were few prospective studies which followed participants over time. These studies showed that symptoms of disordered gambling get worse with comorbid conditions, and vice versa. There were only five studies, excluding case reports, that integrated treatment for gambling and comorbid disorders.

There is a lack of studies exploring the underlying causes of comorbid conditions in disordered gambling and if they share similar causes. It is unclear how the disorders interact to make symptoms worse over time, and factors that increase the likelihood of comorbidity in disordered gambling. Compared to gambling studies, research on substance use is further ahead in exploring causes and treatment effects.

The authors recommend six areas where more research is needed. These areas include:

1. Determining the causes of comorbidity in disordered gambling (e.g. biological factors, social factors, psychological factors).
2. Exploring if comorbid conditions happen before or after disordered gambling, and how the disorders affect one another over time.
3. Understanding whether a person with multiple comorbid disorders has more severe symptoms of disordered gambling than a person with only one comorbid condition.
4. Understanding how comorbidity affects treatment outcomes and designing treatment programs for individuals who have disordered gambling and comorbid conditions.
5. Evaluating system-level programs that bring together different sectors to treat disordered gambling and comorbid conditions.
6. Using research on drug and alcohol use to inform research on comorbidity in disordered gambling.

## Who is it intended for?

This review could be useful for researchers as the authors recommend several areas where future research is needed. It could also be useful for treatment providers to gain insight into existing research. Also, the authors provide suggestions for how to improve treatment for patients who have disordered gambling and comorbid conditions.

## About the researchers

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## Keywords

Gambling, problem gambling, pathological gambling, co-morbidity, review

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