


# How can qualitative research exploring the relationship between trauma and gambling inform both research and intervention practices?



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June 20, 2025



# **EXCESSIVE GAMBLING: PROMOTING AND PROTECTING HEALTH IN A DIGITALISED WORLD**

5th International Multidisciplinary Symposium

**18th - 20th June 2025**

Caux • Montreux

## **Declaration of Financial Interests or Relationships**

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I have no financial interests or relationships to disclose regarding the subject matter of this presentation.

# Introduction

- Gambling-related problems and trauma have been associated with large costs for individuals, their families, and society
- Trauma and PTSD are consistently related to GD<sup>1</sup>
- Gambling also has the potential to lead to trauma<sup>e.g., 2</sup>
- Some have suggested a complex, cyclical relationship between trauma and gambling<sup>e.g., 3</sup>
- Three recent review articles have been published on the topic of trauma and gambling<sup>1,4,5</sup>
  - *All excluded qualitative studies*

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# Addictive Behaviors

Volume 114, March 2021, 106713



## Gambling Disorder and comorbid PTSD: A systematic review of empirical research

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.addbeh.2020.106713> 

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## 2. Method

To address these questions, we conducted a systematic review and synthesis in accordance with PRISMA guidelines ([Moher, Liberati, & Tetzlaff, 2009](#)). A review of available current research yielded the following PTSD and GD related search terms used for the systematic review: trauma, PTSD, Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (all spelling variations), adverse childhood experiences, problem gambling, pathological gambling, Gambling Disorder, gambling addiction, and gambling. Eligibility criteria for articles collected from the literature search were defined as any empirical study (e.g., no single-case studies, theoretical reviews, previous reviews, or qualitative studies) that provided a quantitative relationship between trauma exposure, trauma-related symptoms, or PTSD with gambling, PPG, or GD.

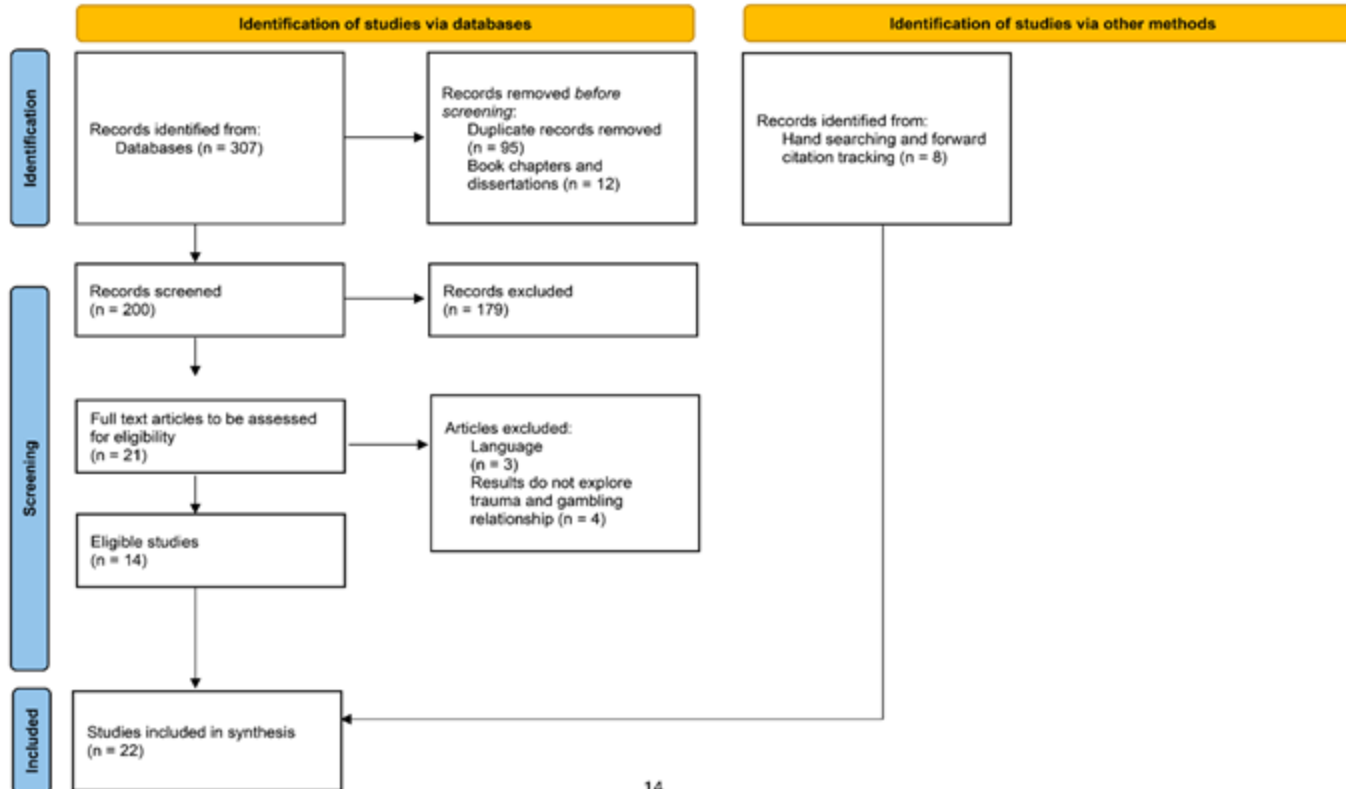
# Objective

The aim of this scoping review was to examine existing **qualitative research** on the relationship between trauma and gambling.

# Methods

- Searching of databases: June 9, 2022
  - Ovid MEDLINE, APA PsycNET, PubMed, Scopus, and PTSDpubs.
  - No language or publication date restrictions
  - Terms trauma\* and gambl\* and qualitative/focus group\*/interview\*/ethnograph\*/semi structured/phenomenolog\*
  - Exclusion terms tbi and traumatic brain injury
  - Review of titles and abstracts (<2% interrater disagreement)
  - Full text review (0% interrater disagreement)

# Flow diagram showing inclusion and exclusion strategies



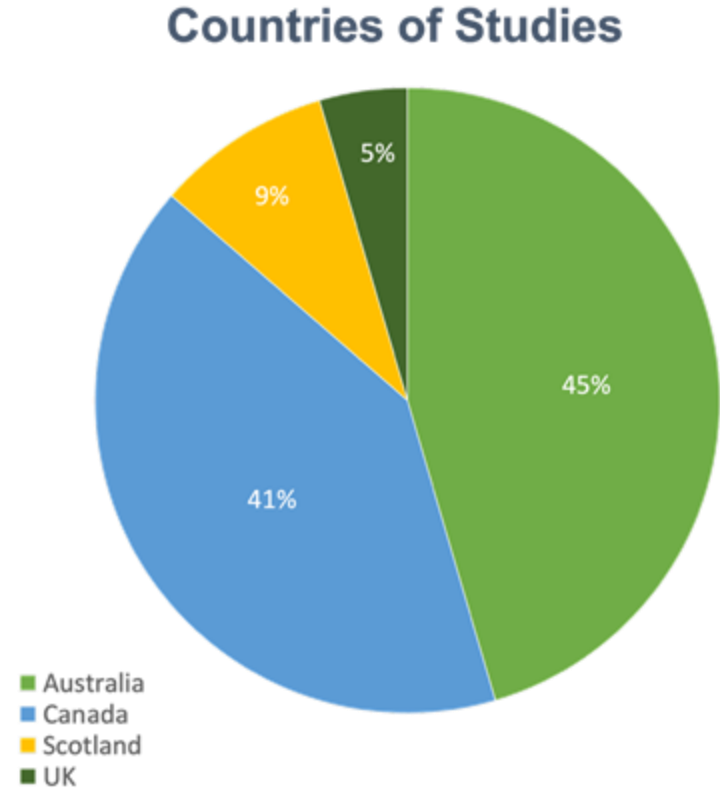
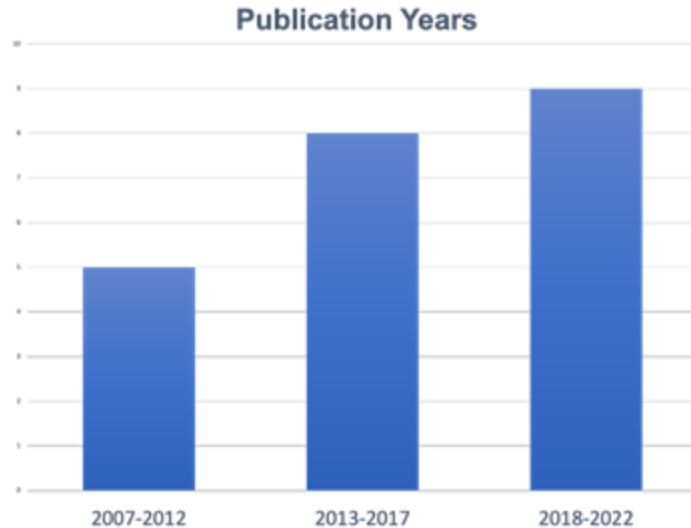


# Results

22 articles (17 independent studies) were included within the scoping review

A minority of the studies' objectives (n = 4, 24%) were specifically focused on exploring the relationship between trauma and gambling

# Results - Characteristics of Studies Included



# Results

## Four common themes emerged from the articles

1. Gambling as a Consequence of Trauma
2. Trauma as a Consequence of Gambling Behavior
3. Cyclical Relationship of Trauma and Gambling
4. Healing from Trauma and Gambling-Related Harms

# Theme 1: Gambling as a Consequence of Trauma

*My brother passed away. He meant a lot to me; he was my mentor... I didn't know what to do. So I said to my nephew 'come with me, let's go for a ride.' He said 'where are we going?' I said 'just for a ride.' So we ended up at the casino and I gambled all night then all day, then all weekend, and that is when my gambling started (Grant Kalischuk, 2010, p. 10).*

# Theme 1: Gambling as a Consequence of Trauma

- Participants described how they sought specific emotional outcomes
  - Seeking an absence of feeling
  - Seeking to feel something different

# Theme 1: Gambling as a Consequence of Trauma

- Intimate partner violence (IPV) related trauma
  - Psychological escape
  - Physical escape

## Theme 2: Trauma as a Consequence of Gambling Behavior

*It was affecting my family and me. I think when you start thinking about suicide, when you attempt it, when you plan it, I think that is when you have to think seriously about what is happening in your life and how gambling is affecting you (Grant Kalischuk, 2010, p. 13).*

## Theme 2: Trauma as a Consequence of Gambling Behavior

*Part of my gambling was to annihilate myself... the gambling, which at first was so attractive just turned into a nightmare of self-abuse” (Nixon, Solowoniuk, et al., 2013, p. 134).*



## Theme 3: Cyclical Relationship of Trauma and Gambling

*The main reason we started arguing was because I was gambling ... I know that there were several factors why it [the violence] happened, but he solely blames it on the gambling ... Once we were full on fighting, no matter what the reason, I started using the gambling as an outlet to get away from him, as an escape (Hing, Mainey, O'Mullan, et al., 2022, p. 7).*

# Theme 3: Cyclical Relationship of Trauma and Gambling

*The longer the relationship went on the worse it got ... financial ... emotional, verbal, psychological ... physical ... the gambling ... dishonesty, shifting blame to me, disappearing for hours ... at the pokies ... it just **creates a cycle** ... of domestic violence ... they'd apologise and promise to change ... and then you're sort of walking on eggshells ... things explode again ... I unfortunately could not see it (Hing, O'Mullan, Breen, et al., 2022, p. 94).*

## Theme 4: Healing from Trauma and Gambling-Related Harms

*The intake worker was gambling specialized, and because it was one of the things I indicated in the intake interview, they made it ... for the funding, you've got to put in a category, and my first bout of counselling was purely for the gambling, even though my gambling was specifically linked to my IPV relationship (O'Mullan et al., 2021, p. 13).*

# Research Implications

- Still many avenues that need to be explored
  - Qualitative work remains scarce within existing literature
  - Seeking *nothing* vs *something else*
  - Physical vs emotional escape
  - IPV-gambling cycles

# Clinical Implications

- Issues with working in silos
  - Relationship between gambling and trauma
- Gambling as a coping strategy
  - Important to be aware that gambling can be used as an escape mechanism
- Importance of entourage (and their trauma)
  - Consider effects on loved ones and provide resources
- Screening, referrals, and treatment
  - Approach gambling and trauma together

# Acknowledgements

Special thanks to:

- Rebecca Scheurich



# Questions?



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