

RELATIONSHIPS AND PROBLEM GAMBLING

There is an association between problem gambling behavior and relationship problems.

- Common problems reported by family members of individuals who engage in problem gambling include loss of household or personal money, arguments, anger and violence, lies and deception, neglect of the family, poor communication, and confusion of family roles and responsibilities.^{1,2}
- Individuals who engage in problem gambling are more likely to have a history of divorce, live by themselves, report having experienced maltreatment in their childhood, and report worse family functioning compared to individuals who do not engage in problem gambling.³



Problem gambling negatively affects intimate relationships and is related to divorce, separation, loss of trust, and greater rates of intimate partner violence.³⁻⁷



A lack of social connectedness, especially among older adults, is a risk factor for problematic gambling.⁸



Children of individuals who engage in problem gambling are more likely to engage in problematic gambling themselves.⁹

It is estimated that one person's problem gambling affects 5-10 other people.^{10,10b}

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INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS AND PROBLEM GAMBLING

- ♦ Partners of individuals who manifest a gambling disorder commonly experience emotional disturbance, (i.e., anger, resentment, depression, anxiety), physical complaints (i.e., headaches, gastrointestinal ailments, hypertension), and behavior difficulties (i.e., excessive drinking, smoking, over/under-eating, impulsive spending).¹
- ♦ Individuals who engage in problem gambling report more frequent discord and arguments with their intimate partner, have partners who are less available to provide aid and protection, and are less confident in the stability of their relationship compared to individuals who do not engage in problem gambling. Partners of individuals with a gambling problem additionally report less emotional connection and spending less free time with their partner than did partners of individuals who do not engage in problem gambling.⁶
- ♦ Gambling problems can lead to poor communication, relationship and sexual dissatisfaction, conflict and arguments, and consideration of separation and divorce.¹
- ♦ Couples in which one partner engages in problem gambling report more insecure attachment bonds (anxious and avoidant) than couples without gambling issues.⁶
- ♦ One study found that 70% of individuals with problem gambling had an insecure attachment style with an anxiety dimension. Individuals with high attachment-anxiety have worries of abandonment.¹¹
- ♦ Individuals with a “fearful” attachment have greater gambling severity than those with a “secure” attachment. Fear attachment is categorized by an intense distrust of others.¹¹

DIVORCE & SEPARATION

- Individuals who engage in problem gambling are two and half times more likely to have a history of at least one divorce, compared with individuals without problem gambling.³
- There is a bidirectional relationship between divorce and problem gambling such that people may have more gambling problems because they are divorced or are divorced because of their problem gambling.⁸

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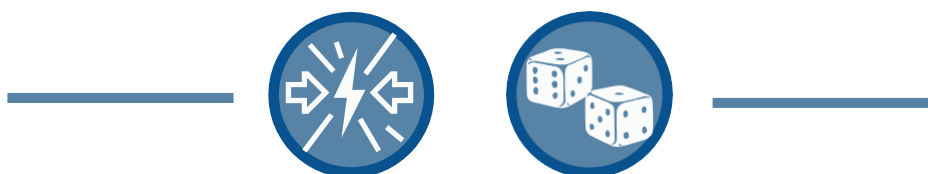
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TRUST AND PROBLEM GAMBLING

- In a study that interviewed current and ex-partners of people who engage in problem gambling, all reported various negative impacts of problem gambling on their emotional wellbeing, mental and physical health, and their relationships. Many partners reported a loss of respect and trust for their partner due to lies, dishonesty, and betrayal; because of gambling.⁵
- One of the most common impacts of gambling on their family reported by problem gamblers were trust issues caused by lies within the family and/or relationship.⁴



INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE, FAMILY VIOLENCE & PROBLEM GAMBLING

- Perpetration of violence against individuals with problem gambling was more likely to occur as a reaction to anger and mistrust.⁷
- Individuals within the family were more likely to be victims of family violence by a family member with problem gambling because of the perpetrator's anger brought on by immediate gambling losses and frustration.⁷
- Approximately 1 in 3 individuals who engage in problem gambling report either being victims (38.1%) or perpetrators (36.5%) of physical intimate partner violence, with prevalence of problem gambling in perpetrators being around 11.3%.⁴
- Among a sample of individuals seeking treatment for problem gambling, the prevalence of family violence (typically parents and/or intimate partner violence) victimization was 18.4% and perpetration was 19.1%.⁸
- Factors related to problem gambling behaviors and being a perpetrator of family violence include; being of younger age, less than full-time employment, heightened anger problems, impulsiveness, alcohol/substance use problems.⁴

Among family members of individuals seeking help for problem gambling, family violence was found in over 50% of the sample.⁷

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PARENT- CHILD RELATIONSHIPS AND PROBLEM GAMBLING

Individuals who engage in problem gambling are generally less likely to live with their children than those without problem gambling.³ However, children of individuals with problem gambling behavior:

- Experience emotional disturbances (i.e., depression, hopelessness, anxiety, confusion, and guilt).¹³
 - Report physical complaints (i.e., asthma, allergies, chronic headaches).¹³
 - Display behavior difficulties (i.e., running away, alcohol and tobacco use, overeating, lower academic/employment performance, and illegal acts).¹³
 - Are at risk of developing gambling problems themselves.¹⁰
- ◆ Facilitators of intergenerational transmission of problem gambling include; gambling or drug use at a young age, parental drug use or mental health problems, gambling as maladaptive coping, and expecting positive outcomes of gambling.¹⁰

Children with a parent or sibling who is engaged in problem gambling are 2-10 times more likely to experience problem gambling compared to people without a parent or sibling who engages in problem gambling.¹⁰

ISOLATION AND PROBLEM GAMBLING

- ◆ Among older males aged 60-90, being single is a predictor of loneliness, which leads to a greater prevalence of problem gambling.¹⁴ While loneliness is related to problem gambling for both men and women, being partnered does not appear to impact older women's sense of loneliness.¹⁴
- ◆ Single, divorced, and widowed older adults have higher problem gambling severity than married older adults.⁹ Loneliness and self-isolation is the mediating relationship between marital status and problem gambling.
- ◆ Gambling to escape feelings of loneliness or social isolation is related to higher problem gambling risk scores and gambling with family and friends is associated with lower levels of problem gambling risk.⁹

3. Black, D. W., Shaw, M. C., McCormick, B. A., Allen, J. (2012). Marital status, childhood maltreatment, and family dysfunction: a controlled study of pathological gambling. *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*, 73(10), 1293-1297

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PROBLEM GAMBLING PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

Given the harmful association that problem gambling has with interpersonal relationships, prevention strategies and methods to intervene are important for community stakeholders to know about.

- ♦ Spouses and partners of individuals who engage in problem gambling often show a lack of awareness and understanding into problem gambling behavior and its social, individual, and familial consequences. Engaging in effective coping skills can buffer adverse effects of problem gambling on spouses/partners.^{1,13}
- ♦ Family members should avoid enabling the behaviors associated with problem gambling, such as not providing financial assistance, not bailing them out of jail, and not accompanying loved ones with problematic gambling behaviors to gambling venues.¹
- ♦ Stakeholders should encourage family involvement in gambling treatment, as it leads to better outcomes.¹⁸
- ♦ Developing community strategies and support to reach older adults to address their loneliness can serve as a protective factor against problematic gambling behaviors. Un-partnered older men (over age 60) are particularly vulnerable.

EFFECTIVE COPING STRATEGIES FOR FAMILIES¹

- Setting boundaries and limits
- Going to church or finding spirituality
- Discovering new interests or activities
- Seeking professional help/assistance and utilizing community supports
- Recognizing gambling as an addiction
- Making a conscious effort to not bailout an individual who gambles problematically
- Taking financial control
- Supporting treatment for those in need
- Releasing guilt and shame
- Engage in self-care such as healthy eating, exercise, and good sleep
- Reaching out to others for support

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INVOLVING FAMILY IN PROBLEM GAMBLING TREATMENT: CAUTIONARY FINDINGS

Studies looking into the impacts of family involvement in gambling treatment have found that outcomes can be mixed. One study found individuals receiving gambling treatment with less than a high school education may not experience the same positive benefits from having their significant other participate in treatment compared to clients with higher levels of education.¹⁸ In another study that reviewed the effects of family involvement in problem gambling treatment, participants reported lower life satisfaction despite improved relationship and gambling behavior.¹⁴

Key Findings

- Problem gambling has adverse effects on not only individuals, but families and family functioning.¹⁴
- Family involvement in problem gambling treatment is related to better treatment outcomes and improved individual and family functioning.¹⁴
- Adverse effects on children of parents who have a gambling problem include: a sense of loss for physical and emotional availability, loss of safety, loss of important relationships, loss of trust, high levels of stress and worry, increased risk for developing their own gambling disorder, and increased risk of mental health issues.¹⁴
- Problem gambling is a risk factor for divorce and problems in intimate relationships, including intimate partner violence.^{3,7}

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