

The prevalence of gambling and gambling-related harm: a systematic review and meta-analysis of the evidence

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Introduction: Gambling has been found to impact the health and wellbeing of individuals, communities, and society. Harms from gambling compare to those caused by depression or alcohol dependence and, as such, gambling is being recognised as a public health issue. This systematic review aims to estimate the prevalence of gambling and gambling risk behaviour.

Method: Peer-reviewed databases (Medline, Embase and PsycInfo) and relevant grey literature sites were searched for articles and reports published from 2010 that included information on the prevalence of gambling and longitudinal studies that investigated risk factors and outcomes of gambling behaviour. Meta-analysis was used to synthesise the quantitative findings.

Results: There were 338 studies that met the inclusion criteria. Across the 359 unique cohorts, 1,708,660 individuals (mean age: 29.8 years) from 70 countries were included in analyses. 243 unique cohorts (n = 1,293,617) reported data for engagement with any gambling activity within the past 12 months, with 61% (95% CI: 58-65; $I^2 = 99.94\%$) of participants estimated to do so. In a 12-month period, adults (68%, 95% CI: 63-72) were more likely to engage in any gambling activity compared to adolescents (40%, 95% CI: 34-46).

Discussions and Conclusions: Gambling is often overlooked as a public health issue, with regulators and legislators struggling to confront the rapid development of gambling opportunities. The results from the current review contribute to a larger body of work and provide a robust understanding of gambling prevalence and outcomes of gambling behaviours that will help guide the necessary public health responses.

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