

Association between gambling and self-harm: A scoping review

Self-harm ranges from thoughts and behaviors about hurting oneself to suicidal thoughts and behaviors.

Understanding the relationship between gambling, gambling-related problems, and self-harm will help protect gamblers.

The Study

Reviewed **190 studies** of gambling and self-harm to understand the available research. Categorized studies according to their **findings about the association between gambling and self-harm**.

Positive Association:
When self-harm is high, gambling is high

Negative Association:
When self-harm is high, gambling is low

No Association:
Self-harm and gambling are unrelated

Mixed:
Some positive and some negative associations

Literature Characteristics



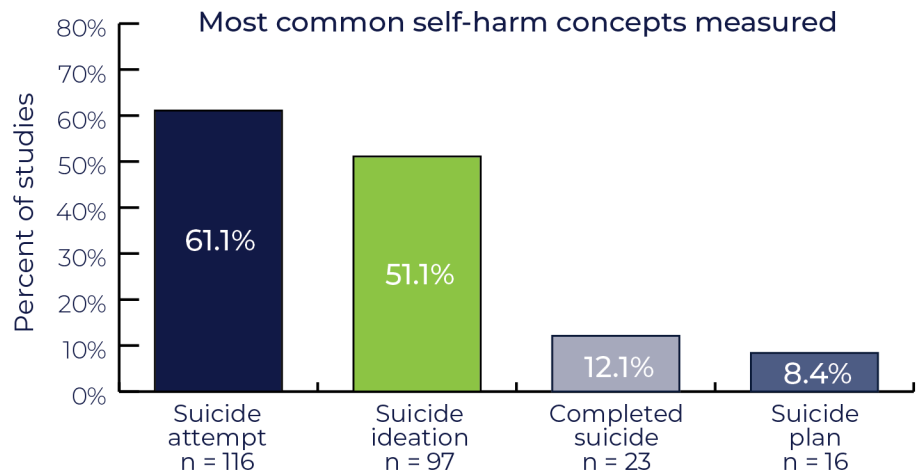
Most studies (89.5%) included **people seeking mental health treatment**. A quarter gathered representative samples (communities/schools).



All studies were **observational, not experimental**.



Most studies (89.5%) **measured gambling and self-harm once, rather than over time**.

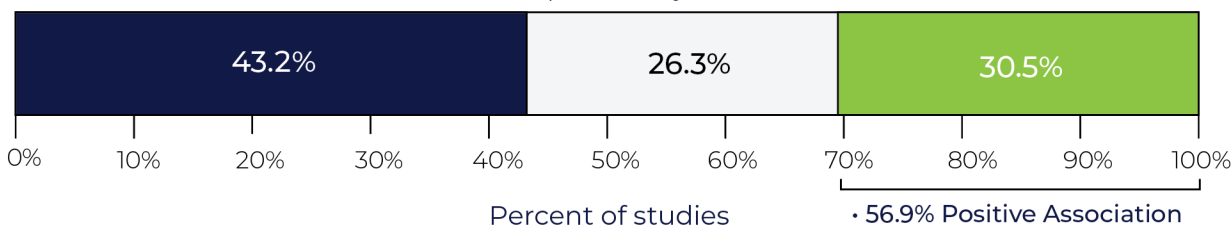


Key Findings

Did not test association between gambling & self-harm; just observed trends

Tested association between gambling & self-harm without testing if it is explainable by other factors

Tested association between gambling & self-harm and tested if it is explainable by other factors



17.4% of all studies found a positive association between gambling & self-harm that is not explainable by other factors, like mental health, age, or financial trouble

- 56.9% Positive Association
- 24.1% Negative or No Association
- 19.0% Mixed

Key Takeaways

Many studies (17.4%) found a positive association between gambling and self-harm, even when considering the possible role of other factors. This tells us that *the positive association is not just explainable by other factors, like mental health*.

Because of this risk, gambling operators should be prepared to guide their subscribers to appropriate resources for self-harm concerns.

Because most studies (89.5%) did not look at gambling and self-harm over time, they do not specifically examine whether gambling causes self-harm.

Higher-quality studies are needed to clarify how gambling and self-harm emerge over time, independently and together, with and without complicating factors.