



Problem Gambling and Mental Health Disorders

Gambling Disorder is a Mental Health Diagnosis in the DSM-5

Did you know that Gambling Disorder is listed right alongside Substance Use Disorders in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition (DSM-5)*? (American Psychiatric Association, 2013)

In fact, three out of the nine diagnostic criteria for Gambling Disorder pertain to psychological impacts: 1) Experiencing restlessness or irritability when attempting to cut down or stop gambling, 2) Being preoccupied with gambling, and 3) Often gambles when feeling distressed (e.g., helpless, guilty, anxious, depressed.) (American Psychiatric Association, 2013)

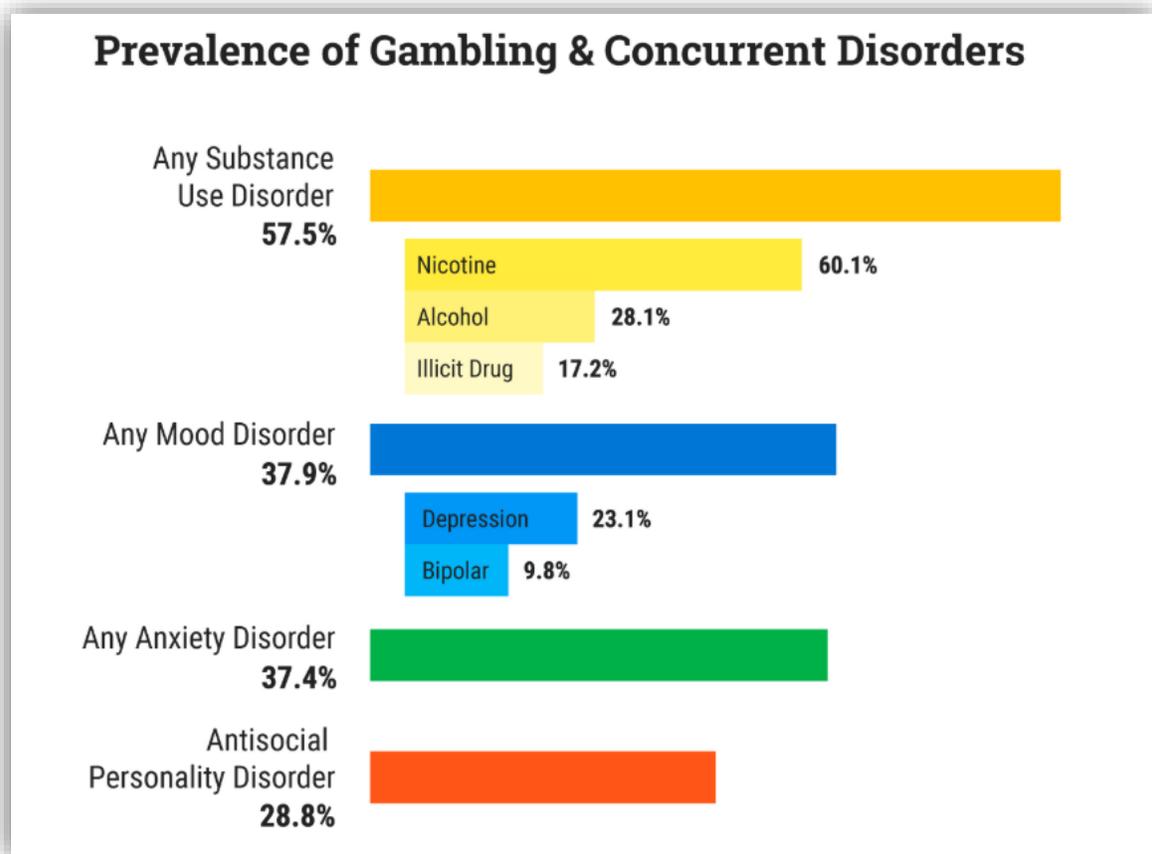


Image Source: (CAMH, 2019)





Suicide is a huge concern

- One study found that among pathological gamblers who had previously sought treatment for substance use disorders, 41% had attempted suicide. For those who had previously sought professional treatment for their gambling, 27.6% had attempted suicide. (Petry & Kiluk, 2002)
- Dr. Timothy Fong summarizes his findings that close to 80% of those who called a gambling helpline reported feeling suicidal at the time of calling, and nearly two-thirds of GA attendees contemplated suicide. (Fong, 2005)
- Suicide rates for the general population can range from 1%-2%, it goes up to around 7%-9% for those with substance use disorders and can increase to more than 20% for those with gambling disorders. (Petry N. M., 2005) That number can increase to 40% suicide attempt rates for veterans seeking treatment, and as high as 66% for suicidal thoughts. (HR, 1998) (Northstar Alliance, 2013)

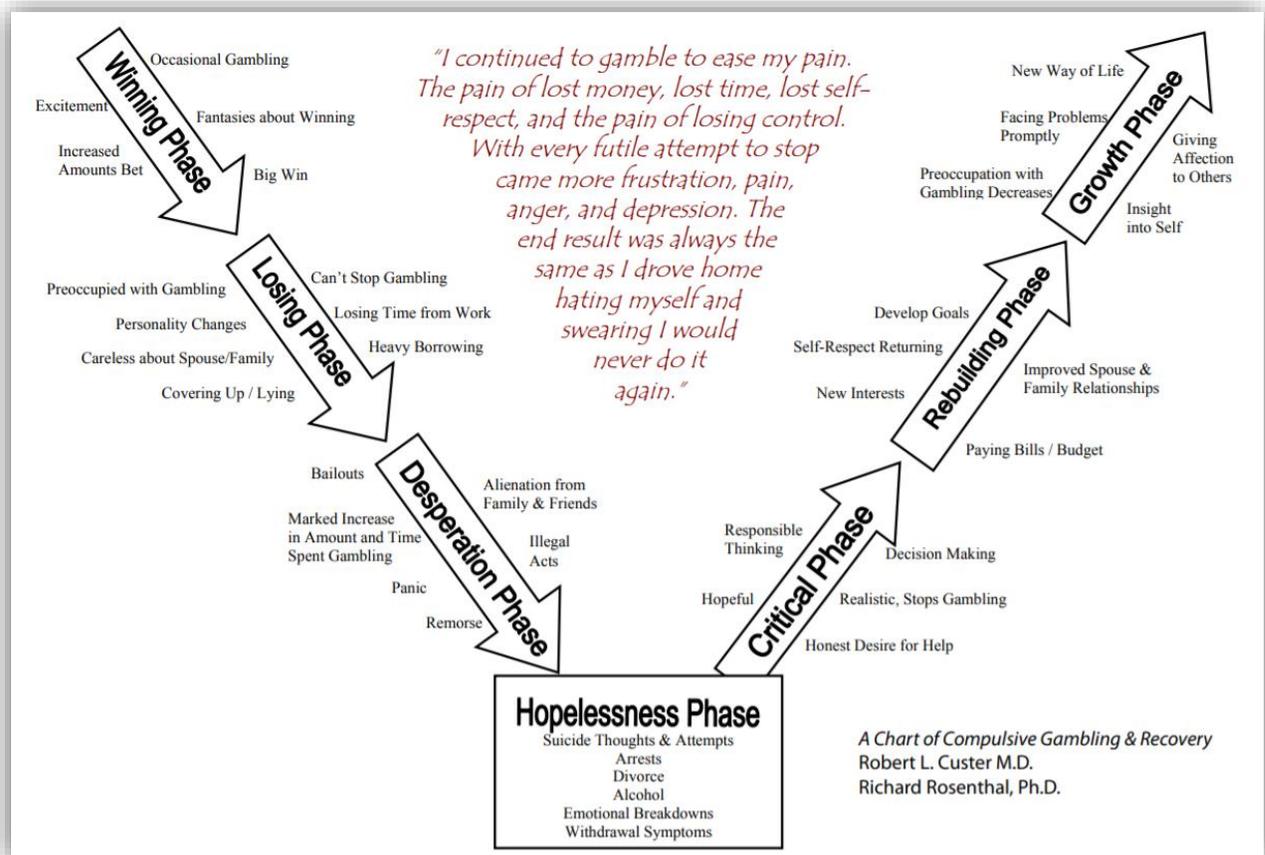


Image Source: (Nevada Council on Problem Gambling, 2010)





Is there a genetic component?

Just as predispositions to be at-risk for certain physical health, mental health, and substance use disorders can be inherited, so can a predisposition to be at risk of a Gambling Disorder.

(Shah, Potenza, & Eisen, 2004)

How do mental health and gambling affect each other?

For some individuals, it may be very clear that one disorder caused the development of a secondary disorder. Perhaps the stress of mounting gambling losses induced anxiety or depression. Or maybe a pre-existing mental health condition caused the use of gambling as an escape or means to cope. For others, both conditions seem to build on each other simultaneously. Below is a list of just a few examples of how gambling and mental health can affect each other.

- **Anxiety** – Gambling may be used to cope with anxiety, while gambling losses may induce or exacerbate anxiety.
- **Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADD/ADHD)** – Gambling may be a means to seek stimulation, reinforcement, or to cope with symptoms. Gambling may increase impulsive decision-making and reduce the use of other coping skills.
- **Depression** – Stresses of gambling problems, feelings of failure and fears for the future can cause or worsen depression. Gambling may also be used as an activity to find relief from depression.
- **Manic episodes and Bipolar Disorder** – While gambling may be an activity used to alleviate depressive states, a manic episode can often be a trigger to gamble during times of extended alertness. For some, even if gambling starts as a symptom of a manic episode, it can become its own addictive behavior and turn into a Gambling Disorder that may need to be treated. The DSM-5 specifically calls for an evaluation as to whether the Gambling Disorder symptoms may be better explained by a manic episode.
(American Psychiatric Association, 2013)
- **Substance Use** – Some may use substances to celebrate gambling wins, or to forget about gambling losses and problems. Others may gamble as a means to have something to do during a state of extended alertness from stimulants. Because alcohol and tobacco are frequently purchased and used inside gambling establishments, some may find that their use of either or both of those substances increases when they gamble. A person in recovery from substances may find that gambling establishments pose a relapse-risk to their recovery. Those with a history of substance abuse are also at higher risk of developing a Gambling Disorder than the general population. (Rash, Weinstock, & Van Patten, 2016)
- **Trauma** – Gambling may provide a means to escape negative emotions or forget painful memories of past trauma. Problem gambling may cause financial and relational





traumas, and the sensory stimulations of a gambling establishment can trigger PTSD symptoms in some.

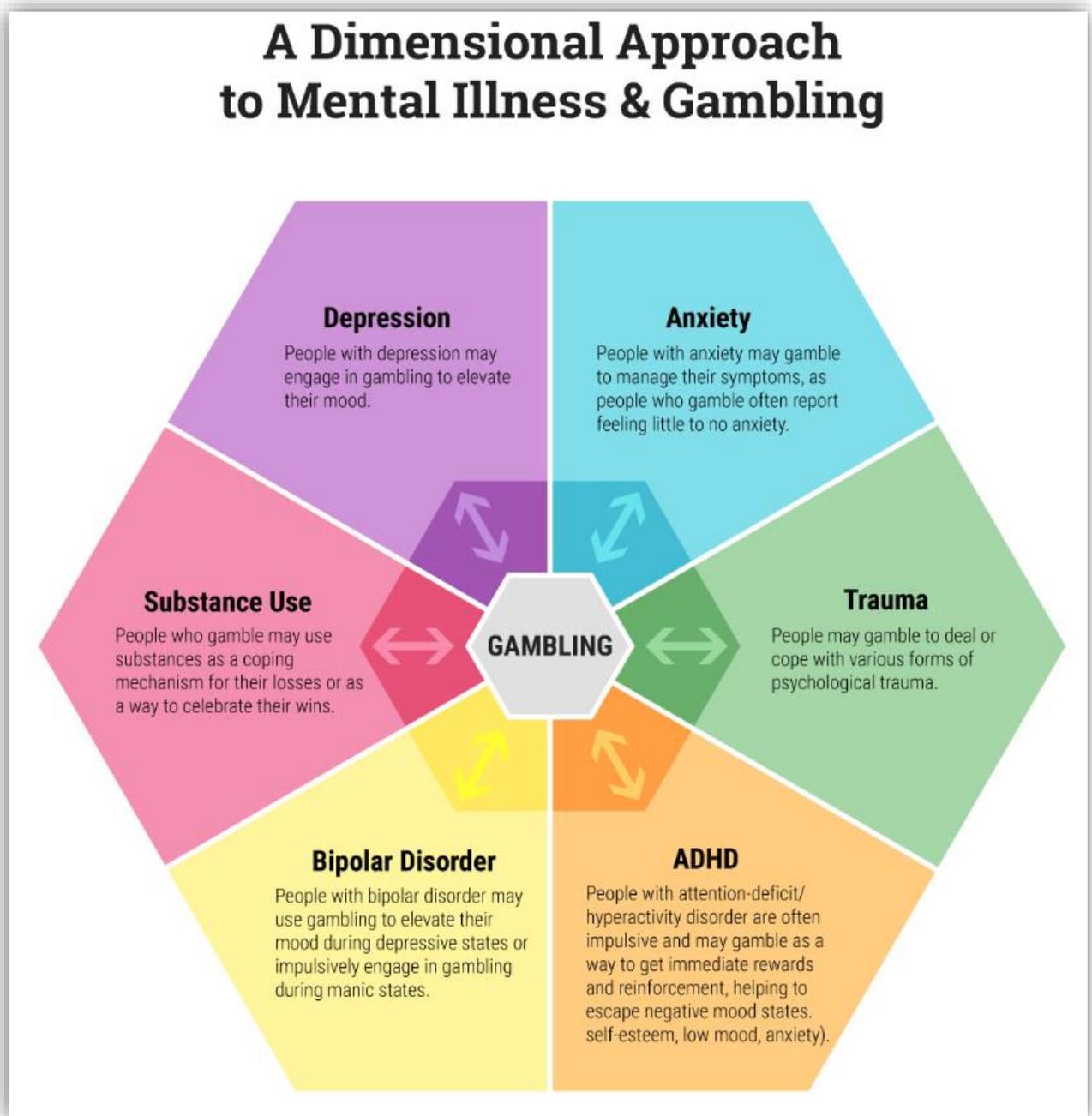


Image [Source](#): (CAMH, 2019)





Prevalence of Co-occurring Problem Gambling and Mental Health conditions:

- Gambling Disorder co-occurs with depression at a rate of 75%, and 30% for Bipolar Disorder. (Fong, 2005)
- A study of 900 patients with severe mental illness found that at-risk gambling occurred in 5.3%, and for those who had gambled in the past year, it was as high as 10.1%. In 52.1% of the cases, at-risk gambling preceded the onset of a major psychiatric disorder. (Bergamini, et al., 2018)
- Data from the National Comorbidity Replication Survey estimate that: 96% of individuals with gambling disorder have one or more co-occurring psychiatric disorders, and more than 60% of individuals with gambling disorder have at least three psychiatric disorders. (Kessler, et al., 2008) (Rash, Weinstock, & Van Patten, 2016)
- The National Comorbidity Replication Survey also found that 49% of respondents with lifetime problem gambling had received treatment services for either emotional or substance use problems, but none reported ever receiving treatment for gambling problems. Of those who had received treatment for emotional problems, 27.9% received those services in the general medical sector, 21.4% from a psychiatrist, and 23.7% from some other mental health professional. In other words, those with co-occurring mental health and gambling problems are much more likely to be treated for emotional problems, than gambling problems.

Simple Behavioral Health Treatment best practices:

- Those seeking services for any mental health condition should be screened for problem gambling.
- Those seeking services for any substance use condition should be screened for problem gambling.
- Those seeking services for problem gambling should be screened for both mental health and substance use conditions.
- It is important that clients be given the opportunity to address co-occurring disorders simultaneously.





References

- American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: Fifth Edition (DSM-5)*. Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Association.
- American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *DSM-5 Fact Sheets: Substance-Related and Addictive Disorders*. Retrieved from American Psychiatric Association: <https://www.psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/practice/dsm/educational-resources/dsm-5-fact-sheets>
- Bergamini, A., Turrina, C., Bettini, F., Toccagni, A., Valsecchi, P., Sacchetti, E., & Vita, A. (2018, June 5). At-risk gambling in patients with severe mental illness: Prevalence and associated features. *Journal of Behavioral Addictions, 7*(2), 348-354. Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6174579/#:~:text=The%20rate%20of%20at%20risk,6.6%25%20cluster%20B%20personality%20disorder.>
- CAMH. (2019, April 15). *Concurrent Disorders*. Retrieved from Gambling, Gaming & Technology Use: Knowledge Exchange: <https://learn.problemgambling.ca/eip/concurrent-disorders>
- Fong, T. W. (2005, March). The Biopsychosocial Consequences of pathological Gambling. *Psychiatry MMC, 2*(3), 22-30. Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3004711/>
- HR, L. (1998). Cost and treatment of pathological gambling. *Annals AAPSS, 55*:153-71.
- Kessler, R. C., Hwang, I., LaBrie, R., Petukhova, M., Sampson, N. A., Winters, K. C., & Shaffer, H. J. (2008, September). The prevalence and correlates of DSM-IV Pathological Gambling in the National Comorbidity Survey Replication. *Psychol Med, 38*(9), 1351-1360. Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2293303/>
- Nevada Council on Problem Gambling. (2010). *Problem Gambling and the Law: An Information and Resource Guide*. Nevada Council on Problem Gambling.
- Northstar Alliance. (2013, Dec. 3). *Suicide Statistics for Compulsive Gamblers*. Retrieved from Northstar Problem Gambling Alliance: <http://northstarproblemgambling.org/2013/12/suicide-statistics-for-compulsive-gamblers/>
- Petry, N. M. (2005). *Pathological Gambling: Etiology, Comorbidity, and Treatment*. Washington D.C.: American Psychological Association.
- Petry, N. M., & Kiluk, B. D. (2002). Suicidal Ideation and Suicide Attempts in Treatment-Seeking Pathological Gamblers. *NIH Public Access, 190*(7), 462-469. Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3397475/pdf/nihms386838.pdf>
- Rash, C. J., Weinstock, J., & Van Patten, R. (2016). A review of gambling disorder and substance use disorders. *Substance Abuse and Rehabilitation, 7*, 3-13.
- Shah, K. R., Potenza, M. N., & Eisen, S. A. (2004). Biological basis for pathological gambling. In J. E. Grant, & M. N. Potenza, *Pathological Gambling: A Clinical Guide to Treatment*. Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Publishing Inc.
- Volberg, R. A., & Moore, W. L. (1999). *Gambling and Problem Gambling in Washington State: A Replication Study, 1992 to 1998, Report to the Washington State Lottery*. Northampton, MA: Gemini Research, Ltd.

