

The Use of Self-Management Strategies for Problem Gambling: A Scoping Review

What is this scoping review about?

Problem gambling is a serious public health concern. It affects people who experience poverty, homelessness, and mental health and substance use issues more than others. Problem gambling is similar to substance abuse. It is when a person has difficulty controlling their gambling and experiences negative consequences as a result. It can lead to severe debt, personal distress, and other serious health concerns. People experiencing problem gambling may not seek services due to denial, feelings of shame, long wait times for services, and treatment costs they cannot afford.

People can do a lot themselves to manage their gambling. This is referred to as self-management; this is when someone uses certain strategies to manage gambling without the help of a professional such as a doctor or social worker. An example of a self-management strategy for problem gambling would be to set a limit on the amount of time and money spent at a casino before prior to gambling (e.g., I will only stay 2 hours at the casino and not spend more than \$100).

The scoping review was completed to identify and describe the knowledge on self-management strategies for problem gambling from published literature. It also identifies the gaps in knowledge that exist.

What is a scoping review?

A scoping review is a summary of research literature on a specific topic to identify key concepts, gaps in research, and types of evidence used. It is commonly used to inform future research, practice, and policymaking.

What did we do?

We included studies that were published in between 2000 and 2017 and examined self-management strategies for problem gambling in adult populations (aged 18+). We excluded studies without a self-management component such as studies that reported on face-to-face treatment, peer support groups, or online discussion forums. The

research team first reviewed the titles and abstracts and selected relevant studies for full text review. Thirty-one articles were included in the review.

What did we find out about self-management for problem gambling?

The 31 articles described 24 self-management strategies for problem gambling. The most researched strategy was **self-exclusion** (reported in nine studies). People can sign an agreement with the operators of land-based and online gambling sites so that they cannot gamble at that site for a specified period of time. There is insufficient evidence to support the use of self-exclusion to reduce or eliminate gambling behaviour.



Figure 1: Word Cloud of self-management strategies included in the scoping review. Larger words indicate that more papers looked at this strategy.

Other self-management strategies were **workbooks** (reported in eight studies) and **money or time limiting strategies** (reported in four studies). Workbooks contain information and exercises that aim to reduce gambling behaviour. Money and time limiting strategies are the setting of a limit on the amount of time and money one will spend on their gambling. Other strategies that were not as common in the review were cognitive approaches used to manage irrational thoughts and beliefs that encourage gambling, and strategies to improve ability to cope with urges to gamble. Some coping strategies can put people at risk of gambling such as wishful thinking and social withdrawal.

What is missing in the literature on self-management of problem gambling?

There is a gap in evidence to support whether these self-management strategies help people reduce gambling behaviours and gambling-related harms. Few studies looked at self-management approaches for people with complex social and health histories (e.g., poverty, homelessness, multiple physical and mental health and substance concerns). Notable gaps include lack of research across age groups (e.g., youth, seniors), income status, sexual identity/ gender, and ethnicity.

How can I find out more information?

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Visit our websites: www.guilcherlab.com and www.stmichaelshospital.ca/labs/matheson



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References

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