

# Gamblers more prone to violent behavior

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An image of a person playing the poker variant, Texas Hold'em. Credit: Wikipedia.

Men who gamble are more likely to act violently towards others, with the most addicted gamblers the most prone to serious violence, new research has shown.

A study published in the journal *Addiction* found that [gambling](#) in any capacity - pathological, problem, or so-called casual gambling - related

to significantly increased risk of violence, including domestic abuse.

Researchers surveyed 3,025 men about whether they had ever engaged in [violent behaviour](#), including if they had ever been in a physical fight, assaulted or deliberately hit anyone, if they had used a weapon, and whether the violence was perpetrated when they were drunk or on drugs. The survey also asked if they had ever hit a child, suffered from mental illness, whether they took regular medication, or exhibited impulsive behaviour.

The men surveyed - who came from a range of socio-economic backgrounds across the UK and varied in age - were also asked about whether they gambled. Eighty per cent of participants admitted to taking part in some sort of gambling activity during their lifetime.

The researchers found a statistically significant link between gambling and violent behaviour, which became starker the more severe the gambling habit. Just over half of pathological gamblers, 45 per cent of problem gamblers, and 28 per cent of 'casual gamblers' reported some form of physical fight in the past five years.

In contrast, among the non-gamblers, only 19 per cent reported being involved in violence.

Additionally, gambling was associated with an increased likelihood of weapons being used in acts of violence, with more than a quarter in the pathological category, 18 per cent of problem gamblers, and seven per cent of non-problem gamblers reporting weapon usage. Just over 15 per cent of non-problem gamblers also admitted to having had a fight while intoxicated, which rose to more than a quarter in problem gamblers and almost a third in pathological gamblers.

The study also found that pathological and problem gamblers are more

likely to have hit a child, with almost 10 per cent of pathological gamblers and just over 6 per cent of problem gamblers admitting to such behaviour. Those with likely pathological gambling problems also had increased odds of committing violent behaviour against a partner.

The results remained statistically significant even after adjusting the data to account for related characteristics such as mental illness or [impulsive behaviour](#). However, it was not clear whether gambling and the propensity towards violence have a common cause, or whether one increases risk of the other.

Researchers said the findings could help improve prevention and treatment programmes.

The study was led by psychologists from the University of Lincoln, UK, working with researchers from Queen Mary University, University College Cork, University of East London, Imperial College London, and AUT University in New Zealand.

Lead author Dr Amanda Roberts, from the University of Lincoln's School of Psychology, said: "Understanding the relationship between gambling and violence will help treatment services tailor intervention and treatment programmes for their clients.

"Our study examined a nationally representative sample of males and confirmed strong links between problematic gambling and violent behaviours, and also showed links with non-problem gambling. The results reinforce the view that public health efforts to prevent problem gambling should include education around violence, and that there could be value in integrating those efforts with alcohol and drug abuse programmes.

"Given the strong associations identified, there is some justification for

establishing a standard battery of screens for gambling, alcohol, drug and violence issues in a range of mental health and addictions settings."

The study participants were men ranging in age from 18 to 64 years and came from a range of socio-economic backgrounds across England, Wales and Scotland.

The level of their gambling problem was determined by scoring a series of 20 questions answered by participants: people with a score of zero to two were classed as non-problem gamblers, those with scores of three and four were defined as [problem gamblers](#), and probable [pathological gamblers](#) were those who scored five or more.

The paper Gambling and [violence](#) in a nationally representative sample of UK men, has been published in *Addiction*.

**More information:** Amanda Roberts et al, Gambling and violence in a nationally representative sample of UK men, *Addiction* (2016). [DOI: 10.1111/add.13522](#)

Provided by University of Lincoln

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