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## **Recommendations for parents and caregivers of children at risk of gambling in light of systematic review of literature**

### **Summary**

The cognitive goal of this article is to provide the knowledge needed to strengthen the educational and preventive competencies of parents and caregivers in the prevention of gambling disorders in children and adolescents. The practical goal, therefore, is to formulate recommendations for parents and caregivers in the upbringing and prevention of gambling disorders in the family and peer environment. The article is a review. This article, which is aligned with theme of the journal, refers to research on the risk factors of gambling disorders in children and adolescents and was based on an analysis of foundational data from a systematic review of English-language scholarly journals over the years 2013–2021. The results of the data analysis made possible a qualitative synthesis and formulation of recommendations for parenting and preventive practice for parents and caregivers.

**Keywords:** gambling, gambling disorder, risk factors, systematic review, parents

**Słowa kluczowe:** hazard, zaburzenia uprawiania hazardu, czynniki ryzyka, przegląd systematyczny, rodzice

### **Introduction**

In the light of the report of the Centre for Public Opinion Research (CBOS) and the National Bureau for Drug Prevention (nowadays the National Centre for Prevention of Addictions, KBPN) of 2019 regarding the distribution and identification of risk factors and protective factors with respect to gambling and other behavioural addictions, persons older than 15 who gambled for money at least once a year in the year preceding the study made up 37.1% of all Poles. Studies show that most often young people, aged 18–34, gamble for

money (CBOS, KBPN 2019). In the light of the presented data, persons exposed to the risk of gambling addiction are primarily minors younger than 18 and young adults younger than 24 years of age. In turn, in the report titled ‘Teenagers in the Web of Gambling, the In-Depth Analysis of On-line Gambling from the Perspective of Gambling Teenagers as the Particularly Susceptible Group’ of 2017 it was indicated that the age of 16 is an age of augmented risk of on-line gambling, while an interest in gambling is diagnosed even in children aged 13–14 and the age of initiation is lowered (CBOS, KBPN 2017). The study reports also show that the accessibility of on-line games, i.e., playing at any moment, anonymity of the player, and playing in solitude usually entail greater intensity of playing among young people. However, it should be noted that a financial win does not have any greater significance for the teenagers because the purpose of playing is integration with peers, emotions, and entertainment.

The theoretical context of studies presented in this paper is the inter-generational transmission of gambling activities in the family observed as part of the study. The respondents noted that in childhood they observed gambling family members and participated in gambling behaviours by selecting numbers in numerical lotteries, buying scratch cards with parents or grandparents, or placing bets (CBOS, KBPN 2017). In turn, studies encompassing seniors allowed for formulating a conclusion about the impact of family and origin on gambling behaviour. Some respondents described gambling with grandchildren and engaging the grandchildren in gambling activities (Lelonek-Kuleta et al. 2017). In the light of the presented study results, it is necessary to raise the level of awareness within the scope of gambling disorders by activities and prevention programmes implemented on every level of impact. Preventive actions carried out at the level of universal, selective, or indicated prevention, and using prevention strategies adequately to the degree of risk should account for the risk factors and the protective factors with respect to the gambling disorders, diagnosed in the groups of recipients. It is also important to note that the risk factors may be specific for gambling disorders and may, in particular in reference to the development age of young people, be general in nature with reference to engagement in diverse risky behaviours.

### **Methodological premises of risk factors of gambling disorders**

The paper presents fragmentary study results encompassing risk factors of gambling among children and young people identified in a systematic overview. The practical goal was to formulate recommendations for parents and caregivers to prevent gambling disorders in children and dependants. The presented study results and recommendations are a part of studies carried out in 2021 at the Jagiellonian University, the purpose of which was to learn the risk factors of gambling disorders among children, youth, and adults (and

among them also seniors). The practical goal was to formulate recommendations for the preparation of preventive programmes with respect to gambling addictions<sup>1</sup>.

The risk factors of gambling disorders were distinguished based on the systematic overview method encompassing English language scientific papers selected with the use of the EBSCO database of scientific publications. A systematic review is a “review of scientific papers with the application of a strictly defined set of methods to reduce systematic errors (bias) with the use of identification, assessment, and synthesis of results of all the important basic studies (irrespective of the study outline) to receive an answer to a specific research question (or a set of research questions)” (Petticrew, Roberts 2006: 10). The studies encompassed four stages: identification, selection, qualification, and inclusion. The three-person research team analysed scientific articles from the years 2013–2021 (the adopted start date for the researched publications corresponds to DSM-5 dated at 2013). The studies used the elements of PRISMA standards, i.e. a control list of guidelines and rules of conduct for researchers with the aim of preparing a top quality research report (Moher et al. 2009). The method of systematic review of literature forms a part of studies identified as Evidence Based Practice. This current is particularly popular in medicine, yet it is also successfully used in social sciences, prevention, health protection, and social rehabilitation (Barczykowska, Dzierżyńska-Breś 2013: 131–152). At the stage of identification and selection with the use of strictly defined sets of key words, 2,197 records were selected; next, based on the analysis of compliance of titles and abstracts with the criteria of inclusion/exclusion and removal of repetitions and qualification of full texts, 124 texts pertaining to the risk factors of gambling disorders in children (4), young people (44), adults (68) and seniors (8) were qualified for analysis. The quality synthesis pertaining to the study of risk factors among children and the retrospective study of adults manifesting gambling disorders was carried out for the needs of this paper and encompasses three selected reports on studies among children and reports selected in detail (12) pertaining exclusively to retrospective studies among adults, i.e. 15 empirical studies published between 2013 and 2021 in English language scientific journals (Table 1).

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<sup>1</sup> The results and recommendations from the studies were presented in a publication by Justyna Kuształ, Małgorzata Piasecka, Aleksandra Nastazjak (2021). The authors of studies in this field and practitioners are engaged in a dynamic dispute pertaining to the conceptual apparatus of behavioural disorders/behavioural addictions. In the light of international classifications of diseases, the nosological units are the gambling disorder and the gaming disorder. Addiction to gambling may be identified with the intense form of gambling disorder, cf. International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (ICD-11), Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-V).

Table 1. Basic reports included in the quality synthesis

No. of study	Bibliographic data
1.	Ahuja M., Cunningham-Williams R.M., Kimberly B., Werner B., Bucholz K.K. (2018), <i>Risk Factors Associated with Gambling Involvement Among a National Sample of African American and European American Young Adults</i> . "Journal of Substance Abuse & Alcoholism", 208(6)
2.	Bellringer M., Taylor S., Savila F. et al. (2014), <i>Gambling Behaviours and Associated Familial Influences Among 9-Year-Old Pacific Children in New Zealand</i> . "International Gambling Studies", 14(3)
3.	Carboneau R., Vitaro F., Brendgen M., Tremblay R.E. (2015), <i>Variety of Gambling Activities from Adolescence to Age 30 and Association with Gambling Problems: A 15-Year Longitudinal Study of a General Population Sample</i> . "Addiction", 110
4.	Dowling N.A., Oldenhof E., Shandley K. et al. (2018), <i>The Intergenerational Transmission of Problem Gambling: The Mediating Role of Offspring Gambling Expectancies and Motives</i> . "Addictive Behaviors", 77
5.	Dowling N.A., Shandley K., Oldenhof E. et al. (2016), <i>The Intergenerational Transmission of Problem Gambling: The Mediating Role of Parental Psychopathology</i> . "Addictive Behavior", 59
6.	Fortune E.E., MacKillop J., Miller J.D. et al. (2013), <i>Social Density of Gambling and Its Association with Gambling Problems: An Initial Investigation</i> . "Journal of Gambling Studies", 29
7.	Gay J., Gill P.R., Corboy D. (2016), <i>Parental and Peer Influences on Emerging Adult Problem Gambling: Does Exposure to Problem Gambling Reduce Stigmatizing Perceptions and Increase Vulnerability?</i> "Journal of Gambling Studies", 33
8.	Goghari V.M., Shakeel M.K., Swan J.L., Kim H.S., Sharif-Razi M., Hodgins D.C. (2020), <i>A Family Study of Trauma and Coping Strategies in Gambling Disorder</i> . "Journal of Gambling Studies", 36
9.	Hearn N.L., Ireland J.L., Eslea M., Fisk J.E. (2021), <i>Exploring Pathways to Gambling: Proposing the Integrated Risk and Protective Factors Model of Gambling Types</i> . "Journal of Gambling Studies", 37
10.	Hood Ch., Parke A. (2015), <i>Differences in Parental Attitudes and Tolerance of Child Exposure to and Participation in Gambling, Alcohol and Nicotine Use</i> . "International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction", 13
11.	Lang A.M., Randall B.A. (2013), <i>Intergenerational Transmission of Gambling: Links Between Young Adult and Perceived Grandparent Gambling Attitudes and Behavior</i> . "Journal of Gambling Studies", 29
12.	Lister J.J., Wohl M., Davis C.Ch. (2015), <i>The Dark Side of Authenticity: Feeling 'Real' While Gambling Interacts with Enhancement Motives to Predict Problematic Gambling Behavior</i> . "Journal of Gambling Studies", 31

No. of study	Bibliographic data
13.	Pitt H., Thomas S.L., Bestman A., Daube M., Derevensky J. (2017a), <i>Factors That Influence Children's Gambling Attitudes and Consumption Intentions: Lessons for Gambling Harm Prevention Research, Policies and Advocacy Strategies</i> . "Harm Reduction Journal", 14(11)
14.	Pitt H., Thomas S.L., Bestman A., Daube M., Derevensky J. (2017b), <i>What Do Children Observe and Learn from Televised Sports Betting Advertisements? A Qualitative Study Among Australian Children</i> . "Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health", 41(6)
15.	Poole J.C., Kim H.S., Dobson K.S., Hodgins D.C (2017), <i>Adverse Childhood Experiences and Disordered Gambling: Assessing the Mediating Role of Emotion Dysregulation</i> . "Journal Gambling Studies", 33

Source: J. Kusztal, own study.

### Quality synthesis of study results pertaining to the gambling disorder risk factors

Initiation to gambling, in the light of the analysed reports, may take place already at the age of 9–11, while a relationship is often identified in the studies between gambling behaviour already in early childhood and subsequent gambling addiction in adult life (Bellringer et al. 2014: 458).

One of the research reports included in the quality synthesis described the formation of pro-gambling stances and consumer intentions in children in the context of exposure to gambling advertisements (Pitt et al. 2017a: 1), while the subject matter of another report was an examination of knowledge and awareness of children susceptible to advertisements for sports betting, and an examination of the relationship between exposure to gambling advertisements and children's stances with respect to gambling manifested by the desire to participate in sports betting (Pitt et al. 2017b: 604–610).

The studies described in the research reports that were incorporated into the synthesis were based on quantitative and qualitative approaches with the use of surveys or structured interviews. The research groups were children aged 6–9 from Canada, groups of children from birth to the age of 9 (longitudinal study), and children aged 8–16 from Australia.

The analysis of risk factors related to the gambling advertisements makes it possible to formulate the conclusions that the children's knowledge about gambling products derives from the media and the omnipresent marketing, but that an equally significant factor was the behaviour of family members and their participation (together with children) in various cultural events, i.e. lotteries, joint participation in sports betting (the local equivalents are *totalizator sportowy* or *STS zakłady bukmacherskie*), along with consumer intentions that emerged in children at that time with respect to sports betting. The in-depth analysis indicates that four key mechanisms are pivotal: the marketing and advertisements of

gambling products, such as sports betting, the link between gambling and cultural events important for a family, knowledge about sport perceived by children, and the influence of family and friends significant for children. These mechanisms account for socialisation factors, which affect the formation of stances, manifestation of behaviour, and motivation to engage in gambling behaviour, in particular sports betting (Pitt et al. 2017a: 1). It is particularly interesting that the children covered by the study excellently remembered the content of sport betting advertisements, in particular the sense of humour used there, intense voices, presence of celebrities, and promotions offered (Pitt et al. 2017a: 1; 2017b: 604). Children correctly used the terminology that appeared in sports betting advertisements and understood gambling behaviour (Pitt et al. 2017b: 608–609).

Studies on the risk factors of gambling disorders where the subjects were adults encompassed students, middle-aged persons, and seniors. The category uniting the results of studies included in the analysis was the family history of various types of disorders related to substance abuse, mental disorders or depression as some of the significant risk factors of gambling (Carboneau et al. 2015: 1985–1993; Lister et al. 2015: 995–1003; Dowling et al. 2016: 11–17).

The studies referred to the theory of parental stances, models of bringing up that functioned in a family, the existence of family ties, and the concept of generational transmission. Oftentimes, the risk factors emerging from the studies included mental disorders, addictions, and criminal behaviour of the parents. In retrospective studies of adults addicted to gambling, the risk factors also included traumas and health problems from the period of childhood (Poole et al. 2017: 1187–1200).

Behaviours forming a part of the factors determined above as mental disorders, addictions, and criminal behaviour of the parents include, among others, the gambling behaviour of the parents or their addiction to gambling (Dowling et al. 2018: 16–20). Similarly, the respondents indicated the gambling behaviour of siblings (Fortune et al. 2013: 329–342), as well as grandparents (Lang et al. 2013: 551–573), and the use of alcohol and tobacco by adult persons from their environment (Fortune et al. 2013: 329–342; Lister et al. 2015: 995–1003).

As noted above, a significant risk factor of gambling disorder is the parental stance towards gambling. If the parents or caregivers or other significant adults accept gambling in advertisements, in mass media, in sport, or in stores, this in consequence leads to the manifestation of such stances by the children (Hood, Parke 2015: 497–505). The pro-gambling stance of parents were manifested, among other things, in the fact that those suffering from gambling disorders were not explicitly referred to as gambling addicts in these families (by these parents). Children growing up with parents displaying such attitudes manifested in adulthood behaviors identified as problem gambling (Hood, Parke 2015: 497–505). The research carried out by the team of Gay et al. (2015: 30–51) showed that older men, whose mothers gambled, were the most susceptible to gambling problems. Acceptance of gambling by significant adults and its perception by children, which translated to their

gambling in adult life, was also an object of the studies of an Australian team of Howe and associates (Howe et al. 2019: 1–17).

The studies of adults manifesting gambling disorders also indicated the risk factors collectively labelled as childhood neglect (Ahuja et al. 2018: 1–8), encompassing such phenomena as: violence in the family, separation of parents, divorce, as well as living with a family member who was diagnosed with problems related to substance abuse, criminal behaviour, or mental illness (Poole et al. 2017: 1187–1200).

The aforementioned childhood traumas were listed in the studies as a risk factor of gambling addiction in adult life, yet this relation was not a direct one, as the coping styles were studied as factors intermedating between a childhood trauma and a disrupted model of gambling. Persons gambling in a problematic mode applied a task-based coping style less frequently than the control group, which may suggest negative childhood experiences. In turn, task-based coping is an intervening variable in examining the relationship between a traumatic childhood and intensification of gambling behaviour in adult life (Goghari et al. 2020: 767–782). The studies outlined here have exploratory potential because they allowed for distinguishing family effects from the effects specific for the disease, i.e. gambling addiction. Negative life experiences may be a risk factor of non-specific nature, as they are related to numerous risky behaviours in adult life, but they are also a risk factor specific for gambling (Hearn et al. 2021: 1–26).

### **Conclusions and recommendations for parents and caregivers of children at risk of gambling disorders**

The validity of tackling problems related to risk factors of gambling disorders addressed in empirical studies seems, in the light of the presented studies, indisputable. The performed studies based on the Evidence Based Practice allow for observing the highest methodological standards and in consequence designing efficient preventive interventions (Barczykowska, Dzierżyńska-Breś 2013: 131–152).

Such issues are rarely presented in Polish reference books (Rowicka 2015; Habrat 2016). The identified risk factors of gambling disorders were presented in the context of studies where the subjects were children, and studies of adults with gambling disorders. A noticeable lack of studies carried out in Poland resulted in the fact that it is unknown whether the diagnostic tools used to measure the risk of gambling disorders in children and in young people and other correlates of these disorders are accurate. The risk factors in English language reports are already diagnosed in small children, hence it is necessary to create and to make use of methods and diagnostic tools intended for them.

After the analysis of selected research reports and identification of risk factors, attention should be drawn to the exposure of children to gambling advertisements and products, such as raffles, sports betting, scratch cards, as well as card games or gaming for money or prizes. Such actions should be primarily addressed to parents, caregivers, and educational



establishments, but they should also be implemented at the level of public policies and provisions, to reduce the risk of exposure of children to gambling products, and to offer protection (Pitt et al. 2017a: 1).

The described studies were carried out in countries such as Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, as well as in Asia; therefore, it is difficult to talk about a direct transposition of the conclusions to the local socio-cultural context, hence the necessity of studies on risk factors in Poland.

The gambling-acceptance stances of parents and caregivers, siblings, or other persons who are significant in the social aspect, affect the formation of pro-gambling stances in children. This calls for increasing the level of knowledge about the risk factors of gambling disorders and other risky behaviour, but also the necessity of shaping parental competence. The parental risk factors such as addictions or the use of violence leading to childhood trauma, may constitute factors increasing the probability of development of gambling disorders in adult life. Bearing in mind the conclusions from the studies above, an attempt at formulating recommendations addressed to parents and caregivers can be made:

- parents or caregivers should be encouraged to expand parental competence with respect to the knowledge about risk factors of risky behaviour and in particular gambling disorders, as well as knowledge about other disorders, which may be predictors of gambling disorders;
- it is necessary to make use of the teaching of parents in schools and educational establishments to make them sensitive to pro-gambling content dangerous for children and to promote a healthy lifestyle free of addictions, while the prevention programmes should include content encompassing the impact of advertisements and marketing procedures on small children;
- parents should be informed about protecting children by universal prevention programmes from the early stage of their development, selective prevention programmes and indicated prevention in later development periods, as such information allows them to give their consent for the child's participation in such interventions and to cooperate with a school or an educational establishment;
- parents should participate in prevention activities on the universal, selective, and indicated level in order to curb their risky behaviour and its consequences in their families.

The study reports outlined above, subject to a quality synthesis, may form a basis for designing and carrying out studies of domestic reference books, as the study reports of Polish research teams are not always indexed in the international database, a fact which leads – on the one hand – to their marginalisation, and on the other to difficulties with accessing them. In turn, literature studies may also become a basis for planning field studies, carried out in domestic socio-cultural conditions and accounting for the specific risk factors and models of gambling in our country.



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