Problem gambling: Comorbidity with other disorders and behaviors

There is evidence that the comorbidity rate for some disorders amongst problem gamblers may be as high as 90%\(^1\). Pathological gamblers experience significantly more comorbidity during their lifetime than others, on average they suffer from 4.7 disorders in addition to problem gambling\(^2\). Among problem gamblers seeking treatment, 49% indicated that a comorbid condition increased the severity of their gambling problem\(^3\). Awareness of disorders that are likely to coincide with problem gambling may highlight individuals at increased risk who should be assessed for disordered gambling, as well as inform comprehensive treatment plans.

**Psychiatric disorders:** Those with psychiatric issues are more likely to have a gambling problem\(^4\)
- **Depression:** Lifetime depression rates among pathological gamblers is between 70 - 76 %\(^1\)
- **Personality disorder:** 87% of compulsive gamblers have been found to suffer from a personality disorder. Specifically, mood disorders: (60%), anxiety disorders (40%), antisocial personality disorder (33%)\(^5\)
- **ADD:** Between 30% and 43% of gamblers met the criteria for Attention Deficit Disorder\(^6\)

**Substance Abuse:**
- Nearly 75% of pathological gamblers have an alcohol use disorder\(^2\)
- Roughly 40% to 63% of pathological gamblers have a drug abuse disorder\(^2,5\)

**Other compulsive behaviors:**
- Estimates suggest that 43% of compulsive gamblers engaged in other compulsive behaviors such as shopping (23%), sexual behavior (17%), and intermittent explosive disorder (13%)\(^5\)

**Suicide:**
- Among Gamblers Anonymous members 12 -18 % have attempted suicide\(^1\)
- Nearly 50% have made plans to kill themselves, and up to 80% reported wanting to die\(^7\)

**Offending:**
- Roughly 50.% of problem gamblers commit crimes\(^9\).
- The severity of problem gambling has been associated with participation in criminal activity.
  - among offenders assessed as severe problem gamblers 68.8% reported stealing or obtaining money through illegal means to pay for gambling or gambling debts, compared to only 26.3% of moderate problem gamblers\(^10\)

**Gender differences:** Among individuals seeking treatment for problem gambling\(^3\):
- A greater proportion of females (32%) than males (21%) reported two or more comorbid problems
- Of the 11 comorbid problems reported, only depression and problem drinking were cited as exacerbating gambling behavior
- Males reported significantly more alcohol and narcotic use, while women reported significantly more eating disorders, compulsive shopping, and tranquilizer use.
A recent study (2005) found that the odds of disordered gamblers having a co-occurring disorder are much higher than what is found among those who are not disordered gamblers:

**Percentage of Disordered Gamblers with Comorbid Disorders (adapted from Petry et al., 2005)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disorder</th>
<th>Odds Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Major depressive episode</td>
<td>OR = 3.0†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety disorder</td>
<td>OR = 3.4‡</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obsessive-compulsive personality</td>
<td>OR = 4.7‡</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug use disorder</td>
<td>OR = 5.4‡</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schizoid personality</td>
<td>OR = 5.6‡</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol use disorder</td>
<td>OR = 6.3‡</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependent personality</td>
<td>OR = 6.6‡</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidant personality</td>
<td>OR = 8.9‡</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paranoid personality</td>
<td>OR = 7.0‡</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicotine dependence</td>
<td>OR = 7.2‡</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antisocial personality</td>
<td>OR = 8.3‡</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Histrionic personality</td>
<td>OR = 8.3‡</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manic episode</td>
<td>OR = 8.9‡</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This 2-item measure has been found to be reliable and valid at discriminating between pathological and non-problem gamblers. A response of “Yes” to either question indicates further assessment is warranted.

1) Have you ever felt the need to bet more and more money?
2) Have you ever had to lie to people important to you about how much you gambled?

For more information visit the GSU Problem Gambling Research and Intervention Project website: [www.GeorgiaGamblingHelp.org](http://www.GeorgiaGamblingHelp.org)

This site offers resources related to problem gambling prevention and treatment. For additional help or technical assistance contact Jennifer Zorland at psyjlz@langate.gsu.edu

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