

13. Identifying High-Risk Groups for Pathological Gambling: Evaluation of Sociodemographic Markers for Future Predictive Modeling

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BACKGROUND: Gambling Disorder is a complex behavioral addiction and an important public health challenge associated with significant psychological, social, and economic consequences. Contemporary classifications, including Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition and International Classification of Diseases 11th Revision, recognize gambling disorder within the spectrum of addictive disorders. Earlier research has linked gambling-related problems with psychosocial vulnerability, relapse, and suicidality; however, data on hospitalized patients, particularly in Balkan populations, remain limited. Therefore, this study investigated sociodemographic factors associated with chronicity, relapse, and suicidality among hospitalized patients with gambling disorder. **METHODS:** A retrospective observational study was conducted at the Clinic for Psychiatry, University Clinical Center of Vojvodina, Serbia. Electronic medical records of patients treated between January 2020 and December 2025 with a primary diagnosis of gambling disorder were reviewed. After exclusion of duplicate and incomplete records, the final sample included 101 patients. Selected variables from the standardized Pompidou questionnaire were analyzed, including sociodemographic characteristics, gambling profile, financial debt, suicidality, and living arrangements. Statistical analysis was performed using JASP 0.18.1.0, with significance set at $p < 0.05$. **RESULTS:** The sample was predominantly male (96.0%), with a mean age of 36.8 ± 10.1 years. Financial debt was present in 62.4% of patients, while suicidal ideation or suicide attempts were recorded in 41.6%. Sports betting was the most usual form of gambling (48%), reflecting the growing accessibility of online gambling platforms. Most patients reported gambling-related problems lasting between 3 and 10 years (37.6%), while 21.8% had problems persisting for more than 10 years, suggesting delayed recognition and progression toward chronic forms of the disorder. A significant positive correlation was observed between age and duration of gambling problems (Spearman's $\rho = 0.29$, $p = 0.01$). Relapse occurred exclusively among patients living with others, demonstrating a significant association between living arrangement and relapse (Fisher's exact test, $p = 0.04$; OR ≈ 0.08 for patients living alone). Suicide attempts occurred exclusively among patients with financial debt, with a statistically significant association between debt and suicide attempts (Fisher's exact test, $p = 0.02$; OR ≈ 14.3). **CONCLUSION:** Gambling disorder stands for a substantial psychiatric and public health burden, particularly among younger and middle-aged men. Financial debt and adverse social circumstances were strongly associated with suicidality and relapse. These findings may help earlier identification of high-risk individuals and support the development of targeted preventive and psychiatric interventions.

Key Words: Gambling Disorder; Suicide; Recurrence; Family Relations; Socioeconomic Factors.

Variable	Statistical test	p-value	Effect size
Age vs duration of gambling problem	Spearman correlation	0.01	$\rho = 0.29$
Age groups vs gambling duration	Kruskal-Wallis	0.03	$H = 10.54$, $\eta^2 \approx 0.06$
Living arrangement vs relapse	Fisher's exact test	0.04	OR ≈ 0.08 , $\phi = -0.31$
Suicidal ideation vs age	Mann-Whitney U test	0.02	$U = 1591$
Financial debt vs suicide attempt	Fisher's exact test	0.02	OR ≈ 14.3 , $\phi = 0.29$