

Involving relatives in treatment for gambling disorder

*A presentation of a clinical set-up
combining individual and relational
approaches*

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Motivation

- 1) The perspective of the relatives (1:6)
- 2) Relatives on solid ground is a resource in treatment for everyone



Gambling Disorder causes relational damage

Scenario:

“Husband loses control over the car. Family ends up in a car crash. All family members are hurt. The wife is badly injured. The ambulance arrives, but takes only the driver to treatment at a hospital.”

Is individual-based treatment ... enough?

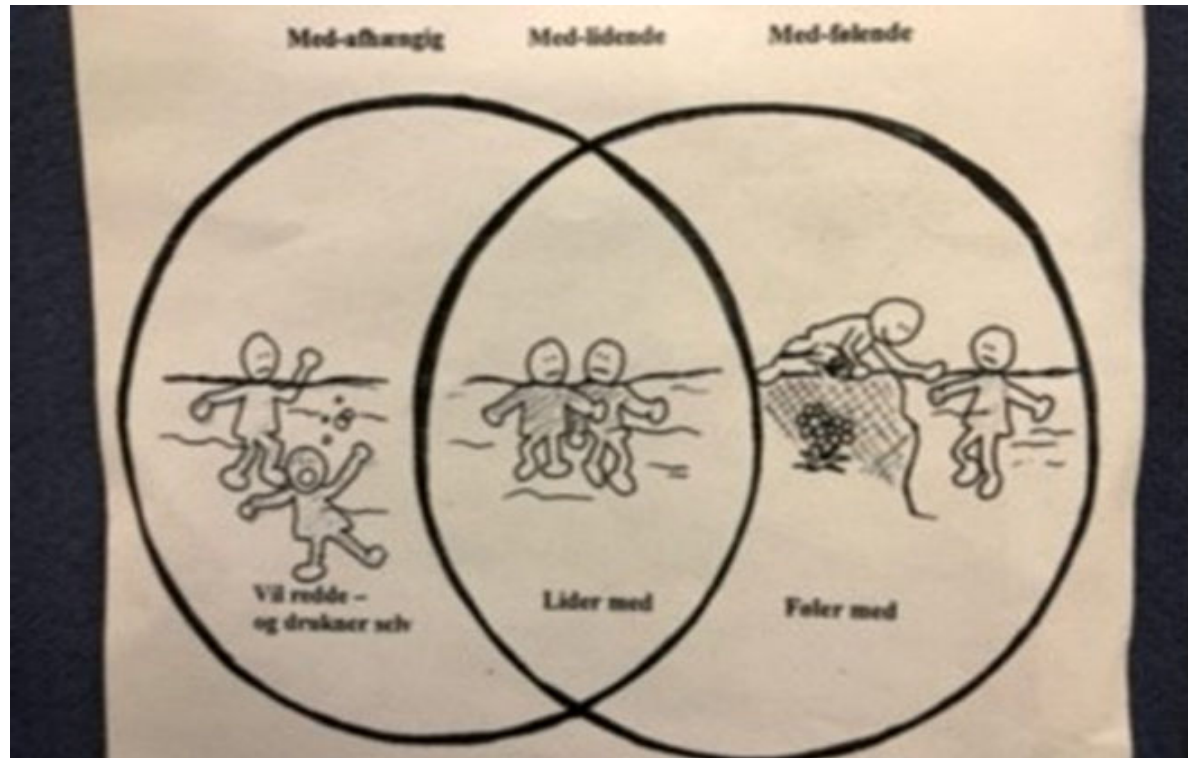
If physical injury ...

Common sense, ethics, scientifically perspectives

Living close to Gambling Disorder

- Economical problems
- Lies and manipulation
- Unpredictability
- Loyalty conflicts
- Isolation from others
- Mood swings
- Irritation and restlessness
- Comorbidity
- Threats of divorce, suicide, criminals
- Being ignored (mentally absent)
- The person you love steal from you
- Victim of fraud
- Mistrust
- Powerlessness
- Shame, guilt, anger, sadness, loneliness
- Exhaustion and confusion
- Infidelity-feelings
- Lying to family to cover up
- Selfcriticism, feeling naive and stupid
- Controlmechanisms take over
- Stressed nervous system
- Protecting the kids
- Worries, stress, depression, anxiety
- Hopelessness

Relatives on solid ground



The Research Clinic for Gambling Disorder

2021-2022

9 psychologists

1 assistant

Functions:

1 Leader of the clinic

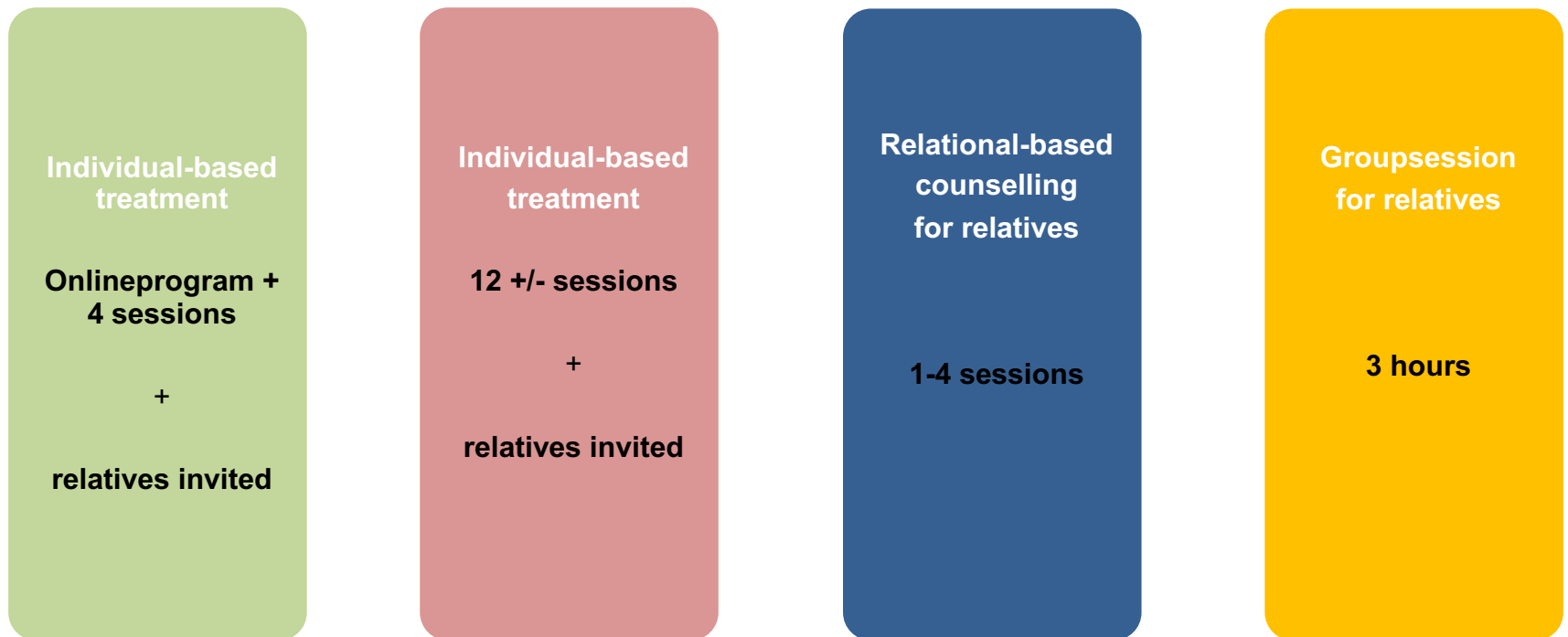
5 Clinical psychologists

3 Researchers



Our clinical set up

individual-based treatment - involving relatives



More relatives seek and get help

Relational-based counselling for relatives (1-4+ sessions)

- 2018: 57
- 2019: 133
- 2020: 107 (corona)
- 2021: 151
- 2022: 168

Questions

- Is it a good idea to involve the relatives?
- For what purposes?

What do we know?

Findings based on:

- 1) Research
- 2) Clinical observations
- 3) Feedback from gamblers and their relatives



Research: Not much - yet

- 1) CBT* is best practice in the treatment for Gambling Disorder = individual-based
- 2) Involving relatives: Not much research - yet
- 3) Meta-analysis across addictions (2021): Involving relatives (CBT+BCT*/ CRAFT*) produce better outcomes in various ways (addictive behavior, relatives symptoms and relation-scores), but conclusion tentative is due to limited studies + limitations
- 4) Studies support: 1) high levels of mental and physical health problems, 2) involving relatives can reduce symptoms, 3) motivate for treatment, 4) gambler stay in treatment, and 5) come back to treatment if relapse.

Problems: Only 5-12 % gambler seek treatment, low compliance, high levels of comorbidity.

*CBT = Cognitive Behavioral Therapy *BCT= Behavioral Couples Therapy

*CRAFT = Community Reinforcement And Family Therapy

Clinical observations

- The relatives emotional pain and powerlessness can be reduced, when the clinic offers different kinds of help.
 - Relatives can play an important role in the proces of the gambler
- 1) Treatment-seeking
 - 2) Treatment itself
 - 3) Coping with craving and stopping relapse after treatment

Relatives need help to 1) start and 2) stop. New responses.

Before treatment

- Anchor on solid ground to cope
- Verbalize worries and keep confronting in constructive ways
- Motivate for treatment
- Break down isolation – talk to good friends
- De-shame the problem
- Learn to stand strong in arguments and pressure
- Re-activate healthy boundaries
- Stop ongoing economical support (financing more gambling)
- Stop sweeping all the consequences away, choose some
- Highlight the intention to help the person, not the disorder

Under treatment

- Back up compliance to treatment
- Celebrate goals
- Show interest for treatment
- Offer support in craving-coping
- Join in sessions – learn about the disorder and typical patterns
- Financial management (short-termed)
- Share thoughts, emotions, dreams again (vs. isolation)
- Keep taking care of own needs

Involving relatives can help reduce pseudo-treatment

After treatment

- Appreciation
- Reduce control to a minimum
- Team up against the disorder (gambler's responsibility!)
- Realistic thinking about the risk of relapse
- Talk about the risk of relapse and copingstrategies
- Alarmbell-talks
- Lifeline in lapse and relapse
- Support treatment-seeking in case of relapse
- Individual or couples therapy to cope longterm
- Stay anchored

Feedback – they often love it (afterwards)

1) The husband

*"Involving my wife have helped me so much. Now I tell her about my cravings and get her support. We both know is my responsibility, but we are a team now. I think it saved my marriage", **Henrik 37 år***

2) The wife

*"I was so hurt and angry. I was about to pack my bag and leave with the children. They were growing up in conflicts and tension. As a father he was there, but either absent or irritable. Without help we would probably be divorced today. We would all be losers in that game." **Lotte, 31 år***

"Married till debts do us part"

Underlying assumptions

- **Relatives on solid ground can be a resource in the process for everyone**
- **Better outcomes in various ways**
- **Minimize pseudo-processes**

Wrapping up

- **Combining individual + relational approaches is good practice – while waiting for research**
- **Higher complexity and pitfalls: The relational approach requires new models, education and special skills (= send more money)**
- **Broader definitions of succes/outcome/goal - than NODS**
- **Identifying subtypes – aiming higher for better longterm results**
- **More research is needed – to understand the underlying mechanisms in recovering from gambling disorder as an individual, as a relative, as a family.**