



Why did it take you so long to seek help?

And how were you met when you opened up about your
disordered gambling?

Early findings from a postdoctoral project about barriers to the
treatment of gambling problems and why so few seek help.

Niri Talberg and Stian Overå
Centre of Competence for Substance Abuse and Prevention
and Research Center for Substance Use Disorders and Mental Illness



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Background

In 2022, 0.6% of the adult Norwegian population (16–74 years) were considered problem gamblers compared to 1.4% in 2019, 0.9% in 2015, and 0.6% in 2013 (Pallesen et al., 2023).

Only 3 % (Kristensen et al., 2022)
to 5-12 % (Månsson et al., 2022)
receive treatment.





Study A:

What are the reflections of elite professional poker players on gambling problems, and what do they think can be done to reduce gambling problems?

Study B:

- 1. How do problem gamblers describe ambivalence towards seeking help, and what do they think can be done to reduce the barriers to seeking help?**
- 2. Experience with TSB from therapists and patients**
- 3. Experience with self-help groups from group leaders and members**



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Is profiting from problem gamblers immoral? Ethics and morality among professional high-stakes online poker players

Niri Talberg & Philip Newall

Received 25 Jul 2024, Accepted 06 Feb 2025, Published online: 25 Feb 2025

Cite this article <https://doi.org/10.1080/16066359.2025.2468443>



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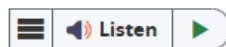
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Research Articles

Elite professional online poker players: factors underlying success in a gambling game usually associated with financial loss and harm

Philip W. S. Newall & Niri Talberg

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Dagny A. Johannessen (OsloMet) Stian Overå and Niri Talberg

From 2023 to 2028, we will study the different treatment paths, conduct interviews and follow-up interviews, and observe treatment. We will explore all the different treatment options as well as disordered gamblers who do not seek treatment.

We will have two meetings each year with our **reference group**, which includes two **former problem gamblers**, one **relative** of a problem gambler, one **therapist** from the interdisciplinary specialized treatment, one **therapist from the gambling helpline**, and one from the remote treatment program. **Two researches** that are **experts on relatives** of disordered gamblers.

Additionally, we will have weekly meetings with the gambling helpline and remote treatment therapists.

WP	Method	Sample
A – the players’ stories	Narrative interviews with players who have received treatment or considered seeking help but have chosen not to seek treatment.	8-18 narrative interviews Collected 13 (11 male) and 8 follow up int
B–The first meeting with professional helpers	Interviews with therapist at the gambling helpline and callers to the gambling helpline.	In-depth interview with 2 therapists who work at the gambling helpline and the chat helpline. If ethically proven and consent is received, we will listen to the phone call (or read the chat) and interview the caller and therapist after the conversation.
C – TSB interdisciplinary specialized treatment - CBT	The 3 researchers will each observe one group session in 3 different treatment centres.	9 observations of group sessions 6 interviews with therapist 9 interviews with patients Just started
D – Public low threshold treatment	Interviews with 2 therapists, if ethically proven and consent is given: monitoring of journal and interviews with five patients.	2 interviews with therapist 5 interviews with patients. Study of journals from patients
E – Self-help groups	The 3 researchers will each observe 1 group session from 3 different self-help groups	9 observations of group sessions 3 interviews with group leaders 3 observations of new group leader trainings



Why did it take you so long to seek help?

Phase1
Exited

- Action, entertainment
- Big swings

Phase 2
Desperate

- The only solution is to win it all back
- The hole becomes deeper , shame kicks in

Phase 3
Num

- The only break from my thoughts is while I play
- Must reach 0 to be able to stop

0

Finally reach 0 vs Post gambling hangover



Phase1
Exited

- Action, entertainment
- Big swings

Often young, 9-12 years old, mesmerized by the slot machine at the kiosk. Almost in a trance. They hear from adults that they are good. Ignore friends' wishes to do something else. Keep returning to the machine. Most of our informants can vividly describe what the first slot machine looked and sounded like.

Trabjerg et al. (2014) describes children's gambling debut as something that makes them proud, accepted, and recognized by adults, and for boys, a rite of passage.

Phase 2
Desperate

- The only solution is to win it all back
- The hole becomes deeper , shame kicks in





The only solution is to win it all back

When was the first time you thought that this is a bit problematic?

Far too late. I guess I didn't really wake up until I didn't get the last consumer loan because I was just going to win it back. And if I had gotten the consumer loan, I would have just kept going.

6

The hole becomes deeper

That's what we gambling addicts struggle with: we want to win it back, but then you dig down more and more, and the tunnel vision comes in. You don't see the consequences of what it does and that it just destroys. That's what has happened every time I have a relapse. So I just have to make sure I don't have those relapses.

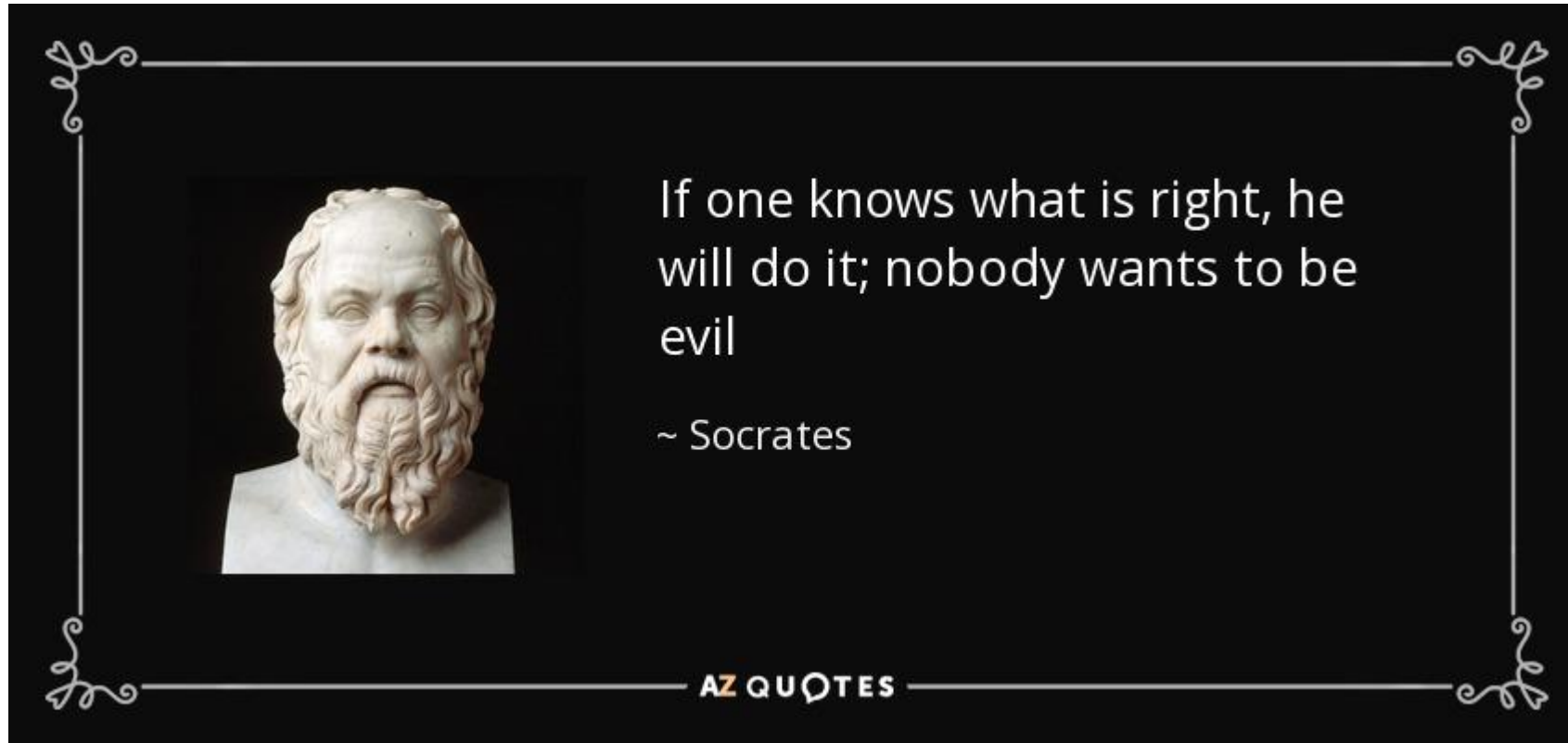
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Shame – barrier to seek help and something that makes you (comfortably) numb

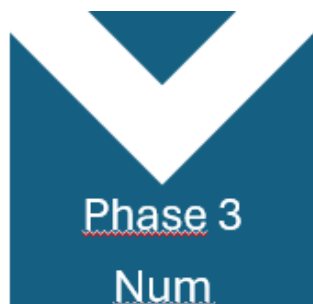
Shame. Being so deep in the gaming bubble, it's so devastating, it's so all-consuming, and it's so shameful, that is. It is difficult to explain how it is experienced, but I experienced it in any case as an indescribable, "alienating" experience. [...]

*There's **no point in trying to explain to people what I'm really struggling with. There is no one who will understand**, there is no one who has the prerequisites to be able to understand what I am facing. So why should I choose to talk to someone?*



<https://www.azquotes.com/quote/1366828>

The fear of being asked:
Why can't you just pull yourself together and stop
gambling
Is a barrier towards seeking help



- The only break from my thoughts is while I play
- Must reach 0 to be able to stop



Finally reach 0 vs post gambling hangover

The money burns in my pocket and in the account, and it is such an extreme feeling that there are many times when I relapse and when I have gambled, I cannot have money in the account. There is a pain there; it is absolutely excruciating. The only thing you think about is the opportunity to play, and at that moment, I can just deposit the money and play it away. When the account says 0, then peace comes, then I can relax, then I can think, then in a way, I can live.

#3

You don't get that much adrenaline from winning; you get a lot more adrenaline from losing everything. There are few things that make you feel so alive as having lost everything and just wanting to die. I never had suicidal thoughts, but what the hell when you are so frustrated with yourself. You feel very alive.

#9

Side note: Some have told us that they think they could gamble again without losing control as long as they don't win. Winning does not feel like the end, they know they will lose it again and don't get exited when partner with similar problems win.



There is hope

From rock bottom to expert on one's own addiction.

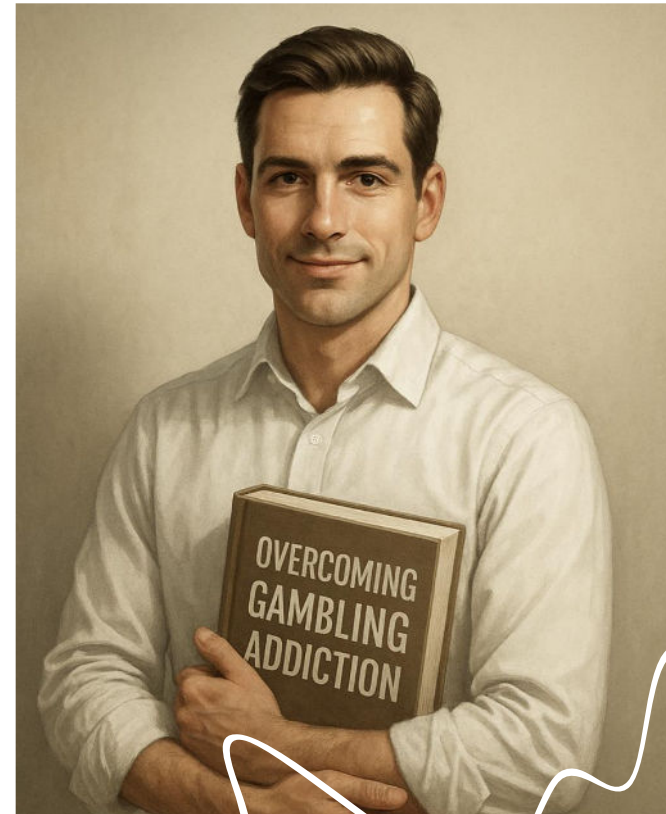
Three ways to avoid asymmetric relationships and feeling small and stupid.





How were you met when you opened up about your disordered gambling?

- Suicide or seek help?
- No one regretted opening up; many were surprised that they were so positively met.
- Next of kin are often a huge resource, yet they lack treatment options for themselves.
- When talking to their partner, they often agreed on fixing it and keeping it secret, but after a relapse, they were more open about the problem, and the partner demanded control over the economy.
- Partners watch documentaries to learn about disordered gambling.
- We will now look at three different treatment options: self-help groups, remote treatment, and interdisciplinary specialized treatment.



Self-help groups: Open arms – short response time

How was your first meeting with Gambling Addiction - Norway [self-help group]?

It was my mom who contacted them the night I told her. Then she got in touch with the group leader, who lived nearby and came over the next day.

#1

How was your first group meeting with Gambling Addiction - Norway?

The first meeting was very good. I called in and told my situation, and I talked to someone there for three hours. Then there was a group meeting the next day. There was a lot of focus on me, naturally enough, since I was new to the group. There were probably five of us in that group. It was extremely nerve-wracking to go in there. It didn't take very long before it loosened up a bit, and I realized that here you can talk without being judged.

#6

Good to be among equals that understand and nice to use own experience to help others





Remote based treatment – Become a expert on own addiction

I:It was absolutely fantastic. Getting a fixed meeting point for 12 weeks where you had lots of things you had to answer in relation to your own problems. You were actually forced to familiarize yourself with your own problem, and they do such a thorough job in relation to what you have answered the week before that you feel taken seriously when you talk to them the following week. You realize that they have done a proper job based on what you answered the week before. So, it was very, very good.



TSB - interdisciplinary specialized treatment

Big threshold to go to the GP; the GP is often surprised and unsure what to do.

The treatment system is difficult to navigate, hard to wait, and sometimes the therapist has little knowledge about gambling.

Preference towards group treatment good to be an expert and advisor for peers. It counteracts the asymmetrical relationship between therapist and patient, where one makes mistakes, and the other knows best.

Has much in common with self-help groups, but the therapists ensure progress, contribute with interpretations, and help you get through in a standardized time. Self-help groups last forever.



Other tentative results (themes)

Duration: 1 to 40 years (refinanced mortgage every year)

Computer games as first addiction

Freespins lead to problem gambling – the operator lures you into more problematic gambling

Share success stories, quickly lose it all, and more

Use several treatment options simultaneously

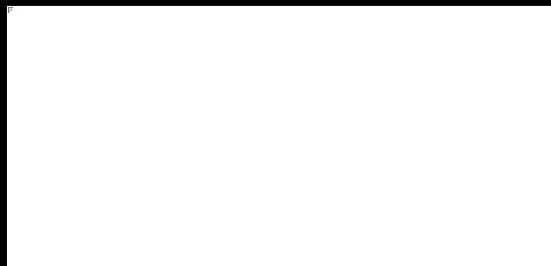
Economy: Empty bank account, then credit card. Consumer loans – pay debts, gamble the rest, and then repeat the spiral.

Confess to partner: Phase 1: Receive support, keep it a secret, relapse. Phase 2: Partner takes control over finances and demands access to accounts.

Cryptocurrency to avoid transfer ban

Problem gambling is a lonely activity – Other gambling is social

Active marketing – WhatsApp



Niri@sykehuset-innlandet.no

Stian.overa@sykehuset-innlandet.no