Exploring experiences of violence amongst women with gambling disorder

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Background & Aim of our project

• Lack of studies focusing on female-specific characteristics & needs

• Limited data on the link between gambling & experiences of violence
  – Existing results indicate that many women with gambling disorder (GD) experienced violence victimization

Aim of our project: Exploring the histories of violence experiences among treatment-seeking female gamblers in-depth

*Project funded by the European Association for the Study of Gambling*
1st step in the project

- Comprehensive **systematic literature review** of all available studies (up to Jan 2018) that utilize measure of violence experiences & include female problem/pathological gamblers

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**PRISMA Flow chart**

- **173** records identified through PubMed, PsycInfo, CINAHL and Web of Science searching
- **8** additional records identified through other sources
- **110** records screened by title after removal of duplicates and non-English/non-German
- **66** abstracts retrieved for further examination
- **46** full-text articles assessed for eligibility
- **20** records excluded on abstract review (not relevant)
- **16** full-text articles excluded, with reasons:
  - No measure of violence victimization: 4
  - No measure of problem gambling: 6
  - No problem gamblers included in sample: 5
  - Review: 2

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Search terms [“violen*” OR “victim*” OR “IPV”] AND [“female” OR “woman” OR “women”] AND [“gambling”] to be included in the title or abstract.
Systematic Review

Selected Results

- Co-occurrence of problem gambling & intimate partner violence (IPV)
  - 12 studies; 7 employed problem gambling samples
  - Rate of female problem gamblers who had been victims of IPV: 7.4% - 68.8%
  - IPV included: physical assault, injury, psychological aggression and/or sexual coercion
  - Ambiguous results regarding gender differences
Systematic Review

Selected Results

• **Family violence** (5 studies)
  – physical, verbal, emotional and/or sexual abuse
  – Rate of female problem gamblers who had been victims of family violence: **21.3 – 77.4%**

• **Childhood abuse/trauma** (15/9 studies)
  – Childhood maltreatment experiences: emotional, physical and/or sexual
  – Rate of female problem gamblers who had been victims of childhood abuse: **8.3 – 40%**
Systematic Review

Discussion

• Large part of problem gambling women had been victims of different forms of violence

• Studies applied a broad variety of measurements & operationalized violence differently

• Majority of studies were cross-sectional
  
  ➔ Further research required to investigate co-development of gambling and violence

  ➔ Qualitative research: Capturing participants’ rich histories of experience

Publication of review in preparation
2nd step in the project

• **In-depth interviews** with Italian women from a treatment group in Milano ($N = 6$)
• Review findings served as an informative basis to develop an **interview guide**
2\textsuperscript{nd} step in the project

• **In-depth interviews** with Italian women from a treatment group in Milano ($N = 6$)
• Review findings served as an informative basis to develop an **interview guide**

The interview guide is available in English, German and Italian. If you are interested in using it for your research, let us know!

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2nd step in the project

- **In-depth interviews** with Italian women from a treatment group in Milano ($N = 6$)
- Review findings served as an informative basis to develop an interview guide
- Interviews were transcribed by an Italian native speaker
- Data analysis: **Interpretative phenomenological analysis** (IPA) approach – *analysis still in progress*
### Qualitative interviews

#### Sociodemographic & gambling characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age, $M$ ($SD$)</td>
<td>57.0 (10.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single/divorced, $n$ (%)</td>
<td>4 (66.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active employment, $n$ (%)</td>
<td>4 (66.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years since 1$^{st}$ gambling experience, $M$ ($SD$)</td>
<td>15.4 (11.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years since regular gambling started, $M$ ($SD$)</td>
<td>9.9 (7.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years since gambling became problematic, $M$ ($SD$)</td>
<td>9.3 (8.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years since treatment sought for the 1$^{st}$ time, $M$ ($SD$)</td>
<td>6.1 (4.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Months in treatment in women group, $M$ ($SD$)</td>
<td>36.8 (22.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOGS sum score, $M$ ($SD$)</td>
<td>8.3 (1.9)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All women indicated that they primarily gambled on slot machines.
Qualitative interviews

Preliminary results – Experiences of violence

• Childhood
  – Witnessing physical violence in the family

*My parents only communicated [with each other] with punches and kicks...*

[father hits mother] *For me, the worst thing was... and is still... watching my father hit my mom... without cause, there was just no reason... I didn’t understand...*

[father hits siblings] *I was... perhaps the one who suffered least... my sister and my brother were hit terribly.*

  – Getting hit by parents (primarily mother)

*My mother hit me everyday... but I never saw that as a bad thing... well, you broke the rules and you got hit – that was that... that was normal.*

  – Father abused alcohol (reported by three women)

*When he drank he was violent, evil, envious,... everything!*
Qualitative interviews

Preliminary results – Experiences of violence

• Adolescence
  – Being raped by a stranger
  
  *I was they crazy one in the house... the one that went out secretly... [if I tell my mother and sister] they will say: you wished for it.*

• Relationship
  – Emotional violence (partner doesn’t stand by woman/leaves)
    ...
    *the violence ... that you cannot realize it [the relationship]... that you cannot make it real... that is beautiful violence... much worse than negative violence.*
  – Verbal humiliation/ controlling behavior
    ...
    *he was good at everything, I was only good at being a mother and wife...* 
  – Physical violence
    ...
    *he hit me... and one day, he took the broom and smashed my glasses... I was so sick of having bruises everywhere.*
Qualitative interviews

Preliminary results – Connections between experiences of violence & gambling

• Normalization & ‘rationalization’ of (family) violence
  → Gambling as rebellion

• Anger, frustration & fear (partner violence)
  → Letting of steam through gambling

• Responsibility at home
  → Gambling as a ‘treat’

Rejection/humiliation by partner
  → Being a different, exiting, sexy person while gambling

*I didn’t like myself anymore... I was strange, nervous, hysterical.*
Qualitative interviews

Discussion

• All interviewed women reported some form of violence experience
  – Most frequently physical family & partner violence

• Experiences of violence should be addressed in treatment
  – Female-specific group therapy – sharing experiences in a safe space

• UNIQUE histories
  – No one-size-fits-all ‘solution’
  – Treatment approaches tailored to the individual needs of women

[Experience of the therapeutic process] *I was very much black or white – but no more. It [the experiences in the women’s group] made me less brutal... more human... with more shades of grey.*
Clinical value

• Violence didn’t seem to facilitate their seeking for treatment, but made more sense for it.
• During the interviews they seemed to open up new files, they made connections they never did before → past violence & gambling behavior
• They connected with past violence they almost suppressed, and were able to tell their stories with new words and ask for help.
• This topic should be taken into consideration in any treatment with female gamblers
Added Clinical value

• interviews as a moment of therapy, with a peculiar aspect of scenery
• Different locations, some more private, some other more public: Oratory, where our group takes place, Bar, (with no slot) house/place of work as caregiver, Sert & Sunncoop venues.
• My worries about being in public places were useless, since we did pay great attention in finding a good privacy setting and it was the best way to talk and share feelings in front of a happy hour or a cup of coffee with sweets in summer time.
• Women who have access to deep denied emotions and removed memories through the interviews
• New insights and connections, new to them and also to me!
• Suffered Violence, G. as excitement, guilty feelings (hypothesis) .
I apologize that I am not able to attend the EASG conference myself, and I am very grateful to **Fulvia** for presenting our research!

If you have any questions, please don’t hesitate to contact me: laura.brandt@univie.ac.at