

Gambling: a “dominant factor” without which the death may not have happened

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Scale of gambling harms and suicide

Estimated **117 – 496 suicides** in England each year involve gambling: 2 - 9% of the total (OHID, 2023).



2.7% of adults in GB suffering 'problem gambling' – 1.4 million people. (GSGB, 2025)

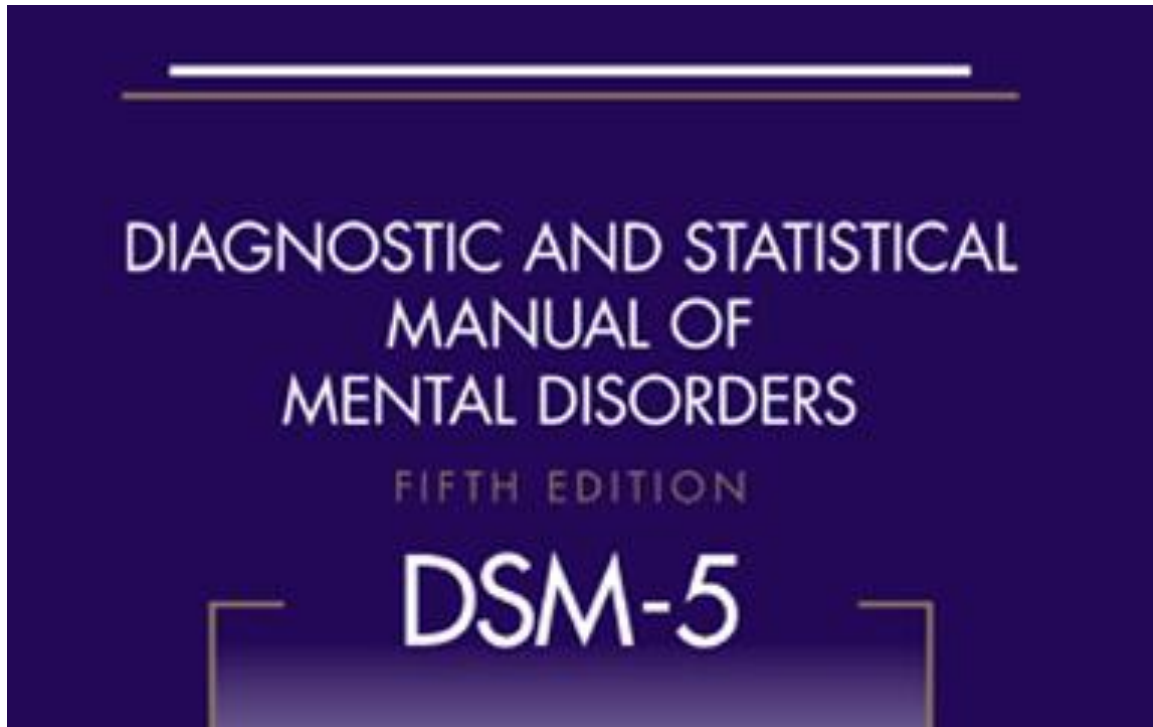


44% of people suffering 'problem gambling' classified as 'at high risk of suicidal behaviour' (GambleAware, 2023)



People suffering from gambling disorder are 15 times more likely to take their lives (Karlsson, 2018)

Gambling Disorder



DSM-5 reclassified “pathological gambling” as “**Gambling Disorder**” and moved it from Impulse-Control Disorders to **Substance-Related and Addictive Disorders** – alongside drugs and alcohol.

This change reflects evidence that gambling activates brain reward systems similarly to substance addictions.

Suicide Prevention Strategy for England:

2023-2028

Gambling highlighted as 1 of 6 suicide risk factors at a population level

It can be a "dominant factor without which a death may not have occurred"

Stronger data, intelligence and systems are needed



Department
of Health &
Social Care

NICE

National Institute for
Health and Care Excellence

Gambling-related harms: identification, assessment and management

(NICE Guideline, 2025)

- Routine screening
 - Alongside smoking, alcohol, drugs
- Unbiased information
 - Why people gamble – addiction
 - Effect on the brain
 - High risk products
 - Targeting – industry practices
- Suicide risk
 - Known link (especially after gambling episode)
 - Safety plan

Psychological Autopsy Research

**Why is there such a
strong link between
gambling and
suicide?**

2 year study involving GwL, GamLearn, Lincoln University and several other UK universities based on a psychological autopsy approach.

Preliminary/draft results highlighted the following themes:

- Industry products and practices
- Normalisation
- Lack of knowledge – public and professionals
- Responsible Gambling narrative
- Shame and self-blame
- Feeling trapped
- Treatment and help-seeking – failures

**Importance
of coronial
investigations
considering the
role of gambling
in a death**

Justice for individuals and families

Current estimate of the number of gambling suicides is based on research studies only

We need an accurate figure based on coronial investigations and findings

The learning from the unique process of coroners' inquisitorial investigation is vital to informing policy and practice

Prevention of Future Deaths reports ensure consideration of concerns and issues identified

INQUESTS & LEARNING

“Gambling Disorder Medical cause of death, without which the death may not have occurred” Coroner

Jack Ritchie's Inquest: ECHR Article 2 (2022)

Coroner ruled that Article 2 was engaged stating: “Arguable that Article 2 ECHR is engaged on the basis of 2 matters: the availability of reasonable medical treatment and the apparent lack of information that might assist families to save loved ones.”

But also noted: “I am deeply cautious of the inquest appearing to become involved in the political aspects of safeguarding potential problem gamblers – for it cannot and must not do so.”

Jack Ritchie's Inquest: Findings

"Gambling led to Jack's death"

The **State failed** in relation to Jack's death: **Treatment** for gambling problems was insufficient; a **lack of training** for medical professionals; a **lack of information** available to the public.

"Jack did not understand that gambling was not his fault - and this led to feelings of shame and helplessness."

"There was a system of gambling regulation, but it was not adequate to prevent Jack from gambling despite clearly and obviously being addicted."

Jack Ritchie's Inquest: Prevention of Future Deaths report issued to DCMS, DHSC, DfE, Gambling Commission, GambleAware & GamCare

Treatment – now 15 NHS specialist gambling treatment clinics across England

NICE guidelines on Gambling Harms: Identification, assessment and management

Information – statutory levy is recognition of conflict of interest created by voluntary levy

Statutory commissioning of both information and treatment (by DHSC & OHID) is recognition of need to transform system affected by conflicts of interest

Increased role for 'health' in regulation?

Further Inquests

LA 2023:

Gambling Disorder recorded as "medical cause of death"

PFD highlighted concern that there had been no meaningful interaction of intervention by the operator Betfair

LAd 2025

Gambling Disorder recorded as a "medical cause of death"

Coroner found that there were missed opportunities by Virgin Games and that he was surprised Lee's levels of gambling did not trigger further interaction or intervention

AS 2026

Gambling Disorder "contributed to his death"

Coroner found risk of harm which was posed by his gambling was not identified by the operator and that mental health services did not identify an increased risk in the period prior to his death.
PFDs forthcoming

Ollie Long Inquest (2026)

Getting gambling considered

PFD highlighted concern about the ease of accessing illegal gambling sites