

# WORKING WITH CLIENTS EXPERIENCING PROBLEMATIC GAMBLING

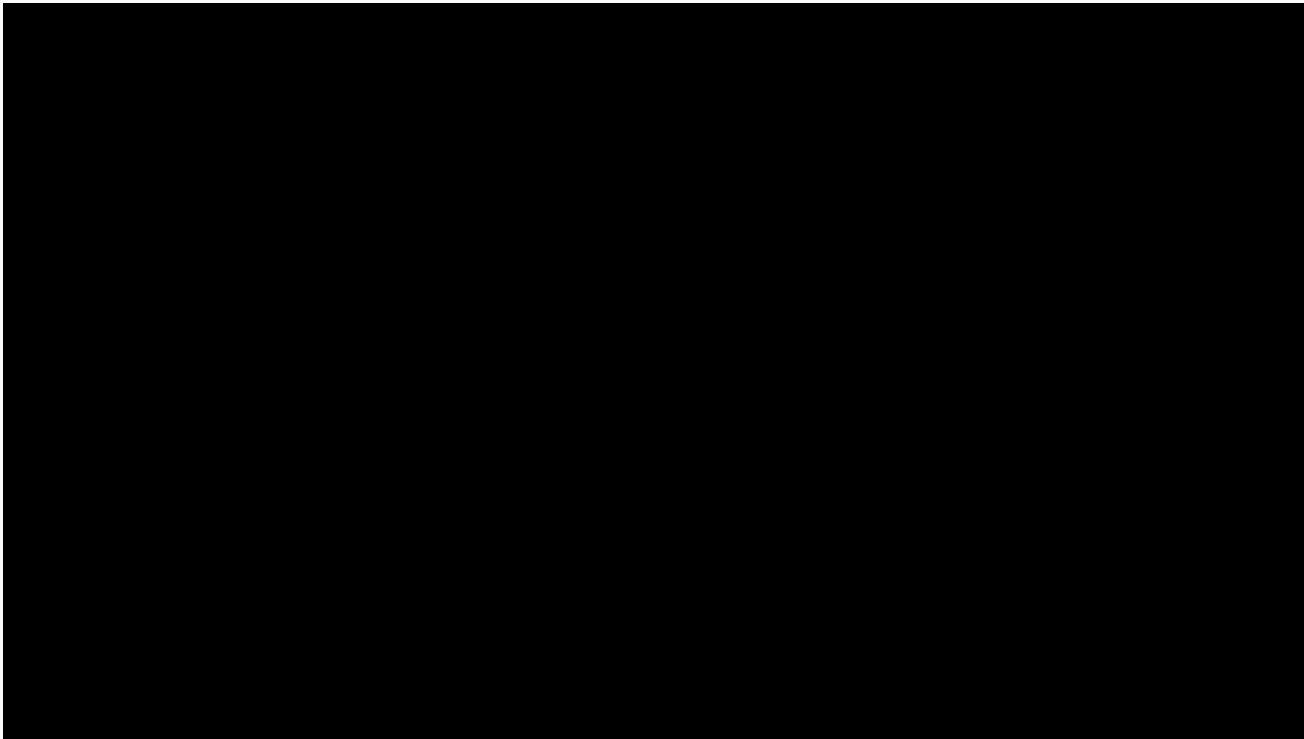
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WHAT IS  
GAMBLING?



# *CASABLANCA*

Casablanca gambling?

I'm shocked! - YouTube

# gambling

**staking money or something of material value on an event having an uncertain outcome in the hope of winning additional money and/or material goods**

(Williams et al., 2016)

# Defining Terms

## **problem gambling**

Characterized by difficulties in limiting money and/or time spent on gambling (impaired control) which leads to adverse consequences for the one who gambles, others, or for the community. (Neal, 2005)

## **gambling disorder**

Current DSM-5 diagnosis

## **pathological gambling**

DSM-IV diagnosis

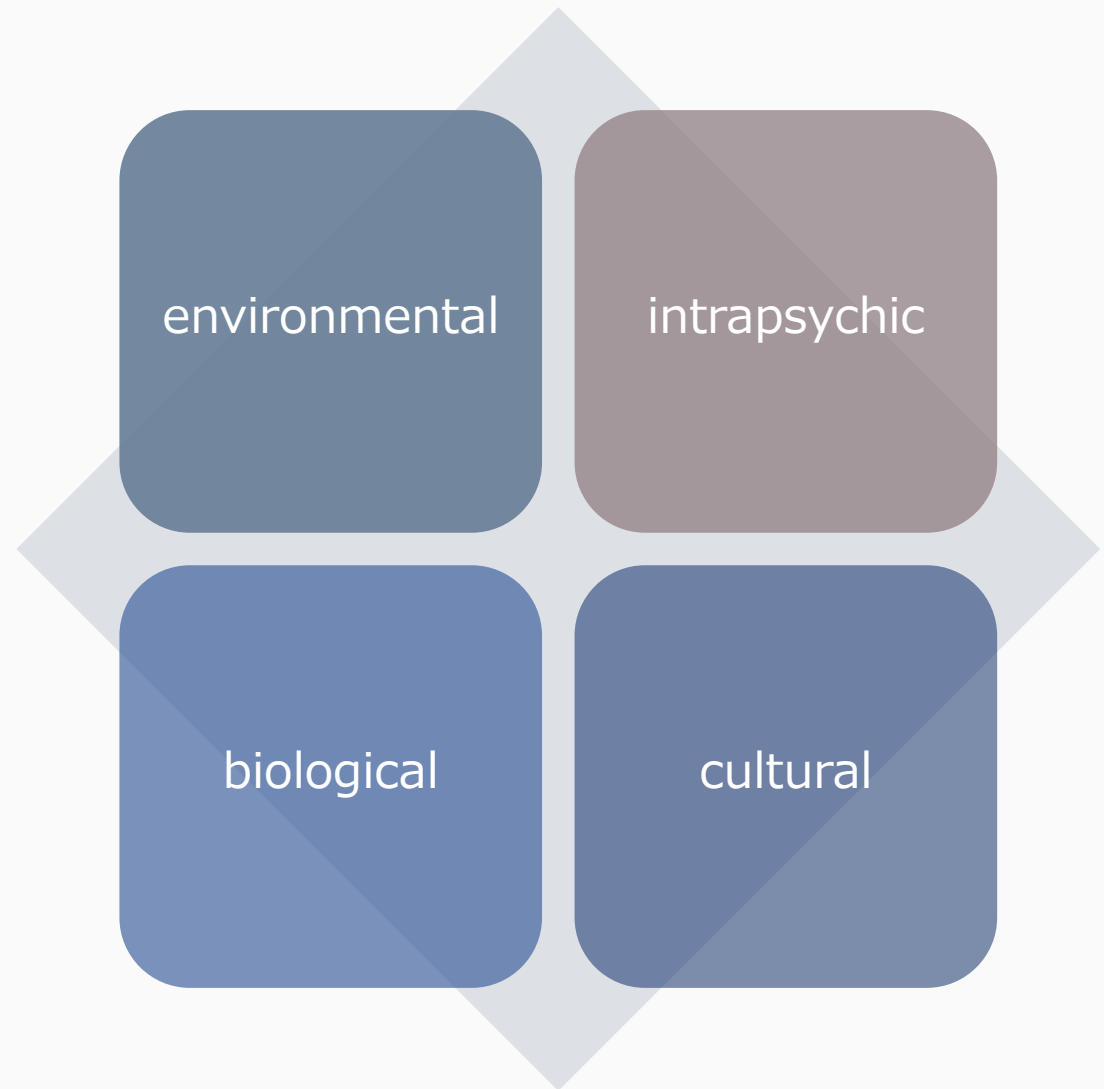
## **compulsive gambling**

A lay term, used in Gamblers Anonymous

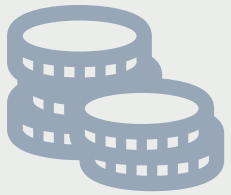
# Examples of Gambling

- Bingo
- Card and domino games when played for money
- Games of skill for consideration (pool, darts, shuffleboard, golf)
- Sports betting
- Lottery tickets
- Games found in a casino (slots, cards, dice)
- Horse racing/dog racing
- Lottery video terminals (VLT)
- Online poker, gin-rummy, etc.
- Scratch tickets
- Cock fighting/dog fighting
- Stock/commodity market
- Fantasy sports
- Daily fantasy sports
- Social gaming
- E-sports

“The fundamental premise is that disordered gambling represents the outcome of a complex matrix of environmental, intrapsychic, biological, and cultural factors.”  
(Richard et al., 2013)



# Why do people gamble?



To win money  
or solve  
financial  
problems



Excitement,  
competition,  
or challenge



Entertainment  
or fun



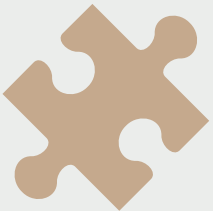
Stress relief  
or mood  
regulation



Tradition



Marketing  
or  
accessibility



Other...  
?

(Boughton & Falenchuk, 2007; Carliner et al., 2021; Lloyd et al., 2010; Tse et al., 2012; Binde, 2012)



# Blurred Lines

(Tira & Jackson, 2015)

- when gambling is included within a video game
- when gambling is part of family or cultural traditions
- when gambling is seen to benefit a state, community, or charity, as in raffles or lottery
- when laws dictate what is legal and illegal gambling, legal forms may appear as games “with prizes”
- when gambling is promoted as skill-based instead of based on chance

# Other Gray Areas



investing

(including real estate, stock market,  
business, retirement funds)



fantasy sports



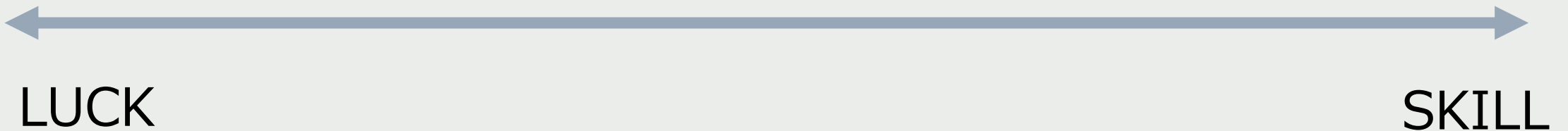
small sports bets

# Luck vs. Skill

**Gambling games also vary in terms of how much luck or how much skill is involved.**

some games are entirely  
based on chance

some games have an  
element of skill



# SCOPE OF GAMBLING AND PROBLEM GAMBLING

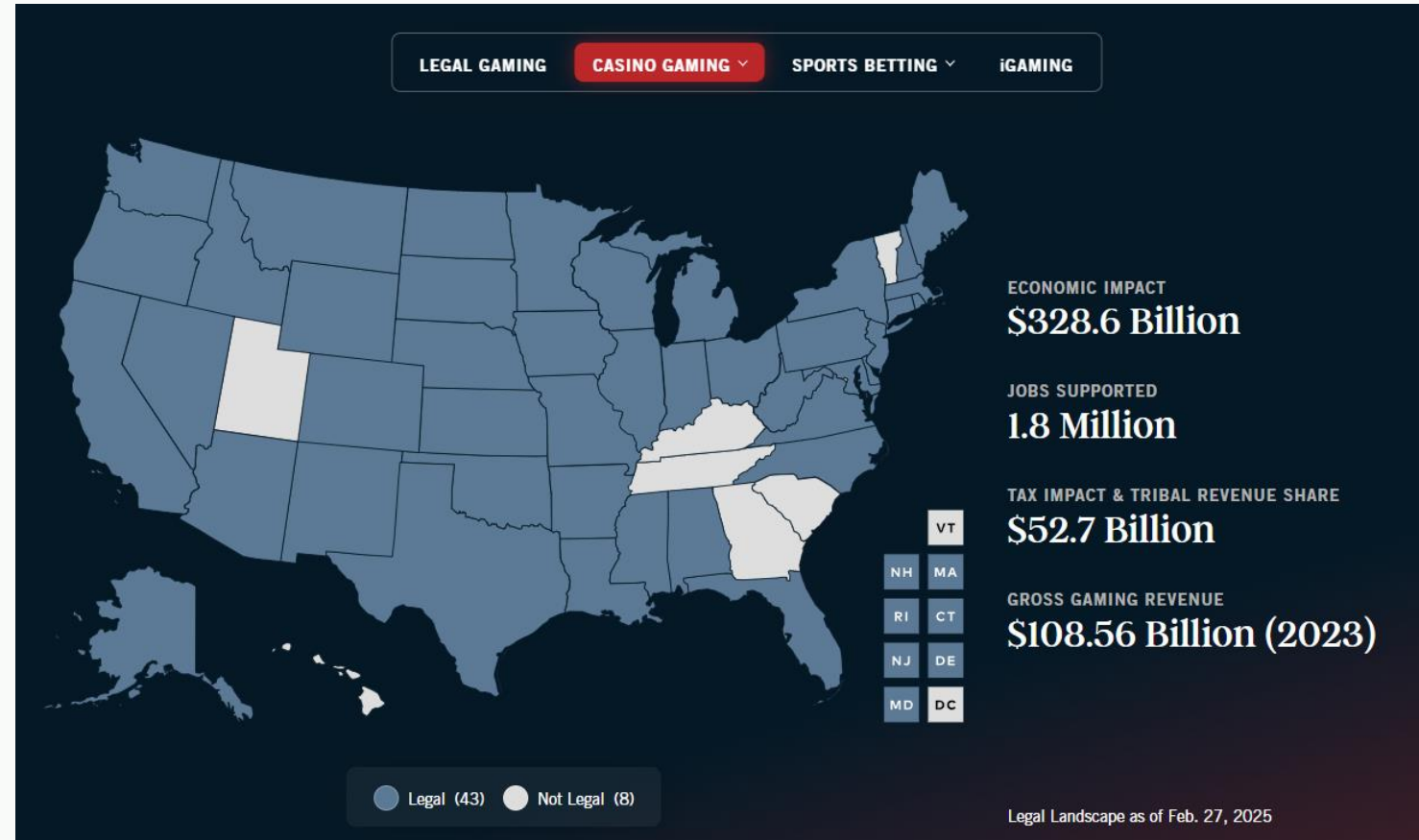
In 2025, **43**  
**states** have  
legalized  
casinos:

27 have commercial  
casinos

29 have tribal casinos

American Gaming  
Association. (2025). State of  
play.

<https://www.americangaming.org/research/state-gaming-map/>.



# Legal Sports Betting in the US

*(February 2025)*

American Gaming Association. (2025). State of play. <https://www.american-gaming.org/research/state-gaming-map/>.

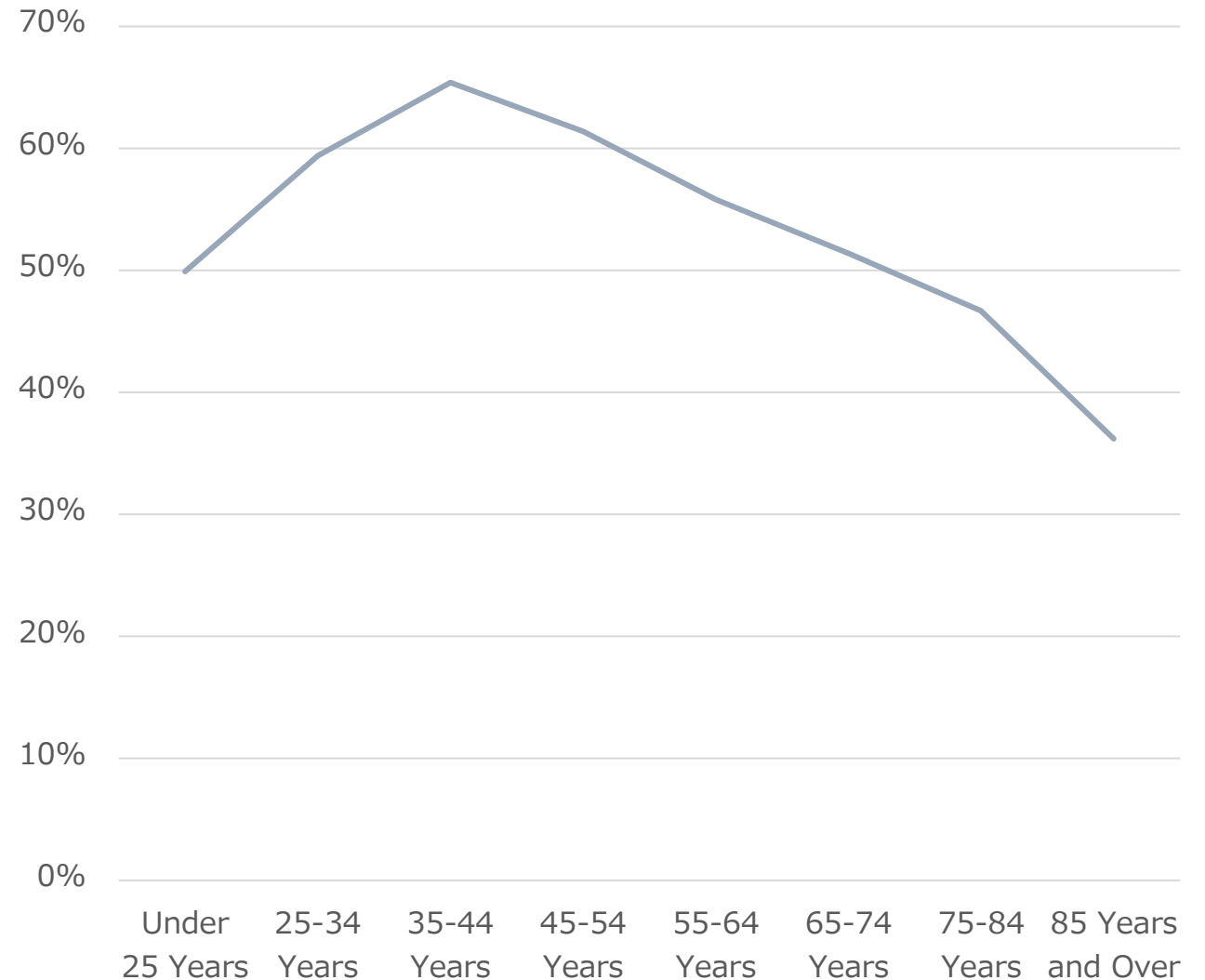


# Oklahomans Who Gambled in the Past Year

65%

(Harwell et al., 2023)

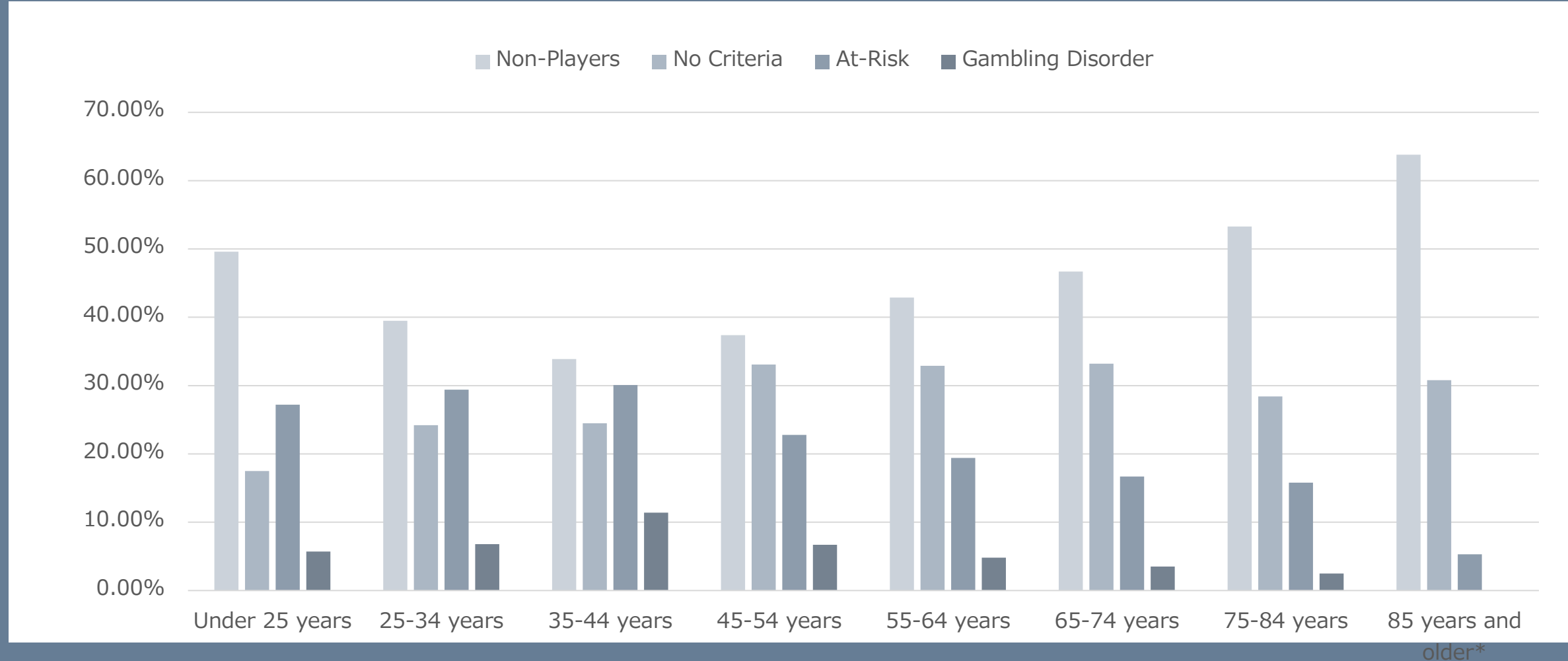
## By Age



# Age and Problem Gambling

(Harwell et al., 2023)

Note: Asterisk indicates the 95% CIs range is 15% or greater, suggesting caution should be used with interpreting the percentages.





OKLAHOMA

# Statewide Prevalence Rate

## GAMBLING DISORDER

In 2022, 6.3% were estimated to  
have a gambling disorder.  
That's 200,000 adults in Oklahoma.

## AT-RISK

Another 23.5%, or 700,000  
Oklahomans, are at risk.

(Harwell et al., 2023)

OKLAHOMA

## Problem Gambling by Ethnicity

**Asian\* 10.2%**

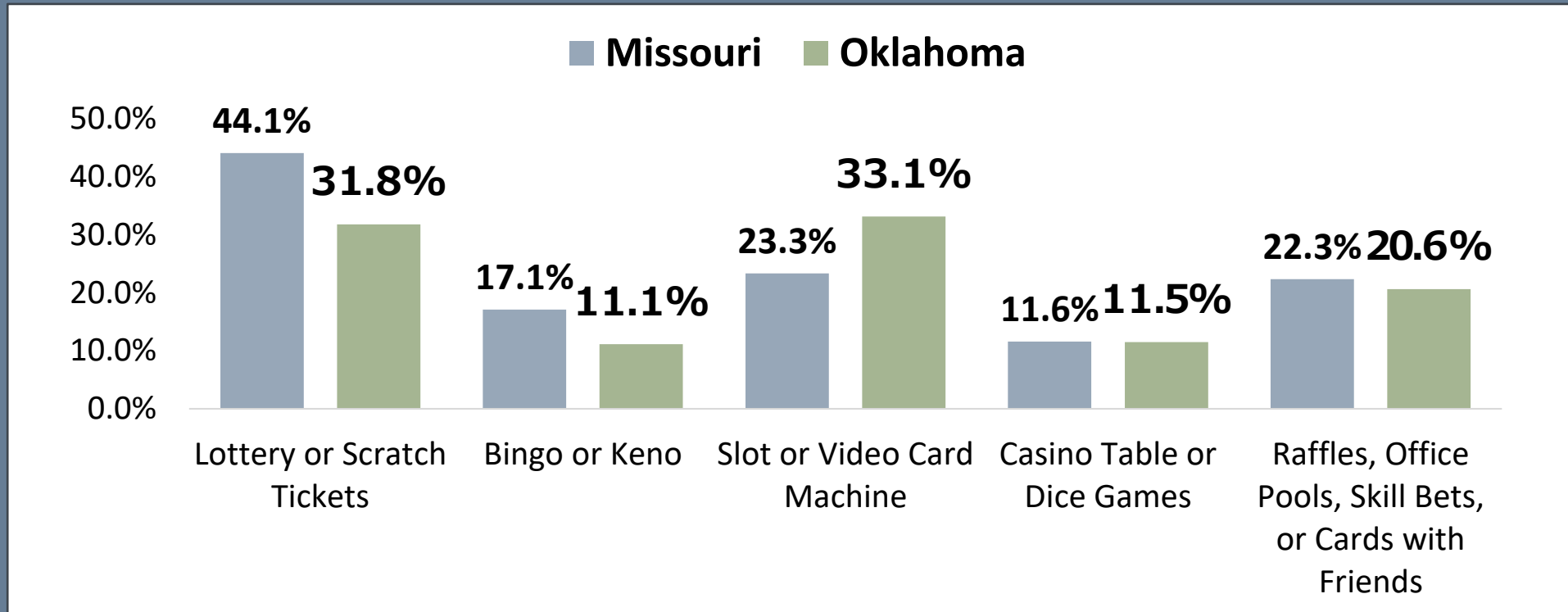
**Black/African American 7.1%**

**White 5.8%**

**American Indian or Alaska Native 5.7%**

Note: Asterisk indicates the 95% CIs range is 15% or greater, suggesting caution should be used with interpreting the percentages.

(Harwell et al., 2023)



## Top Five Gambling Activities

*(Among Those That Do Some Form of Gambling)*

**The most alarming finding is the rate of suicide attempts among problem gamblers.**

18.4%

of those who qualified as  
having a gambling disorder  
**contemplated suicide**

23.2%

of those who qualified as  
having a gambling disorder  
**attempted suicide**

(Harwell et al., 2023)

# DIAGNOSTIC CRITERIA

# DSM-5

## Reclassification of Gambling

Significant changes to  
“Substance-Related and  
Addictive Disorders.”

Places “Gambling Disorder” in  
“Substance-Related and  
Addictive Disorders,” under  
“Non-Substance-Related  
Disorders.”

**The change reflects scientific research findings that indicate that gambling disorder is similar to substance-related disorders in clinical expression, brain origin, comorbidity, physiology, and treatment.**

(Petry et al., 2013)

# DSM-5 Gambling Disorder Criteria

- a. Needs to gamble with increasing amounts of money in order to achieve the desired excitement.
- b. Is restless or irritable when attempting to cut down or stop gambling.
- c. Has made repeated unsuccessful efforts to control, cut back, or stop gambling.
- d. Is often preoccupied with gambling (e.g., having persistent thoughts of reliving past gambling experiences, handicapping or planning the next venture, thinking of ways to get money with which to gamble).
- e. Often gambles when feeling distressed (e.g., helpless, guilty, anxious, depressed).

# DSM-5 Gambling Disorder Criteria

- f. After losing money gambling, often returns another day to get even (“chasing” one’s losses).**
- g. Lies to conceal the extent of involvement with gambling.**
- h. Has jeopardized or lost a significant relationship, job, or educational or career opportunity because of gambling.**
- i. Relies on others to provide money to relieve desperate financial situations caused by gambling.**

**Mild:** 4–5 criteria met

**Moderate:** 6–7 criteria met

**Severe:** 8–9 criteria met





CO-OCCURRING DISORDERS

*Co-occurring Health Issues*

## Gambling and Medical Problems

Per DSM-5, “Gambling disorder is associated with poor general health . . . Some specific medical diagnoses, such as **tachycardia** and **angina** are more common than in the general population.”

# Associated Health Issues with Problem Gambling

## Sleep Disorders

- Linked to depression, stress, headaches, insomnia, and anxiety (Black & Allen, 2021; Landreat et al., 2020; Rodriguez-Monguio et al., 2017; Hing et al., 2017)
- REM sleep disruption (often associated with exposure to alcohol, nicotine, or medications prescribed for depression/anxiety) (Butler et al., 2019)

## Heart Disease

- Presenting symptoms of heart disease, high blood pressure, angina, and tachycardia can be exacerbated by gambling and stress (APA, 2013)

## Digestive Ailments

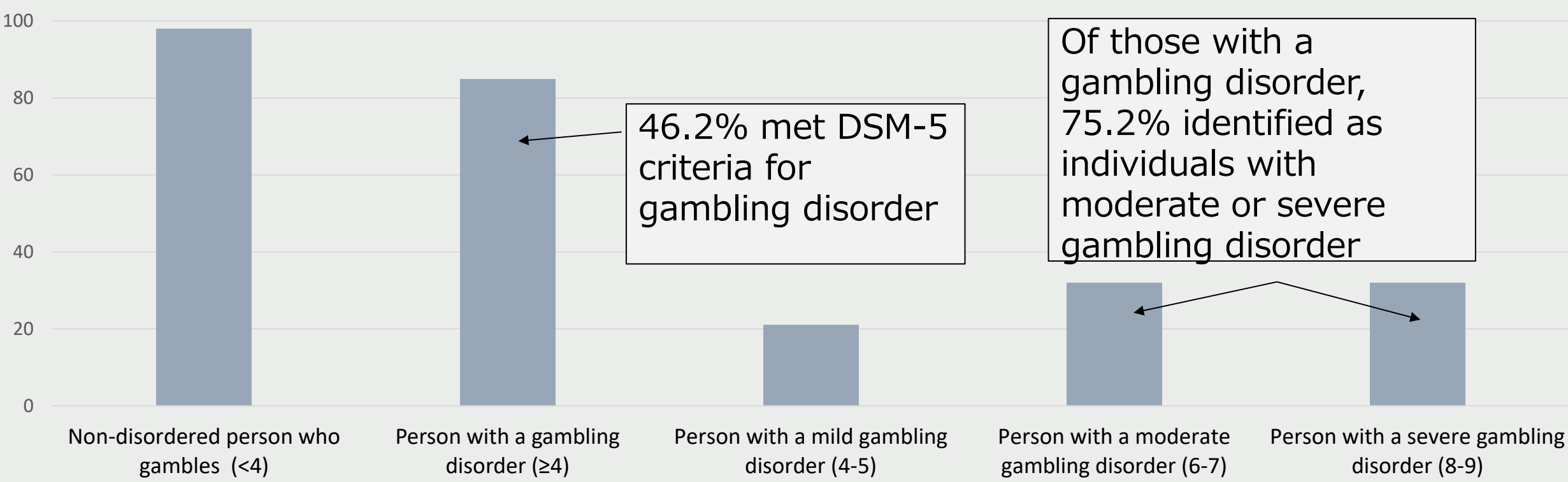
- Malnutrition, obesity, heartburn, dehydration, and ulcers (Butler et al., 2019)

# CO-OCCURRING DISORDERS

*Co-occurring Substance Use Disorder*

# Percent of Clients in SUD Treatment Meeting DSM-5 Gambling Disorder Criteria

A significant amount of SUD clients meet the criteria for moderate or severe gambling disorder.



(Himmelhoch et al., 2016)

# CO-OCCURRING DISORDERS

*Co-occurring Mental Health Disorders*

# Serious Mental Illness and GD

## *Impact on Treatment and Recovery of Serious Mental Illness*

- 19% of individuals in treatment with diagnosis of **schizophrenia** or schizoaffective disorder met criteria for problem gambling
- PG associated with **depression, alcohol use** problems, greater **legal problems** and higher utilization of **MH treatment** (this associated with recreational gambling as well)

(Desai & Potenza, 2009)

Among adults diagnosed with psychotic disorders in an Australian sample:

4% low risk gambling

6% moderate risk

6% disordered gambling

(Haydock et al., 2015)

# Suicide/Depression

People with a gambling problem experience higher rates of suicide.

- Research shows a strong link between gambling disorder and both suicidal ideation and attempts.
- The risk increases in people who have co-occurring mental illness or substance use issues.

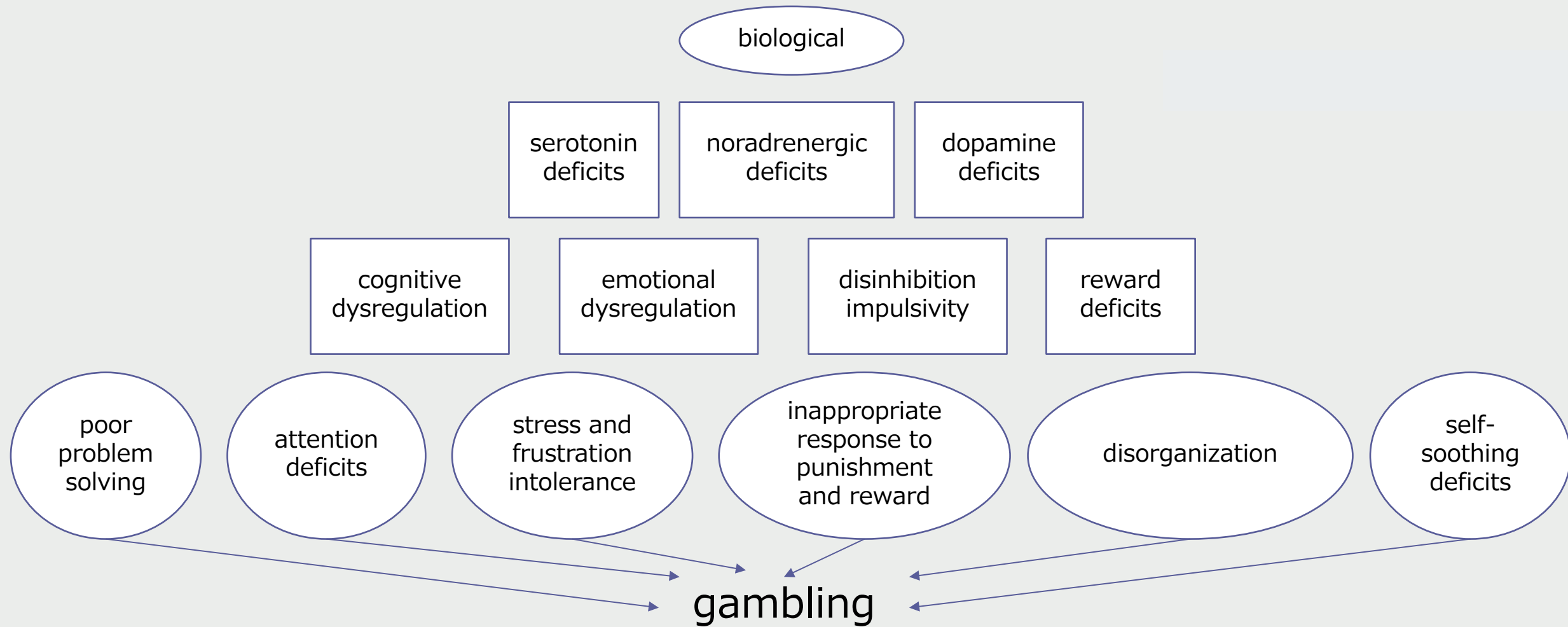
## POPULATION-BASED STUDY:

As many as **49.2%** of individuals with gambling disorder experience suicidal ideation and **18%** attempt suicide.

(Moghaddam et al., 2015)



# BIOLOGY AND PHARMACOLOGY



Solution to all problems. Intensity focuses attention (acts as stimulant). Relieves stress. Focus on intermittent rewards. Becomes organizing principle. Acts as mood stabilizer.

# Habit Formation

## **Novelty and rewards**

- intermittent
- random
- unpredictable



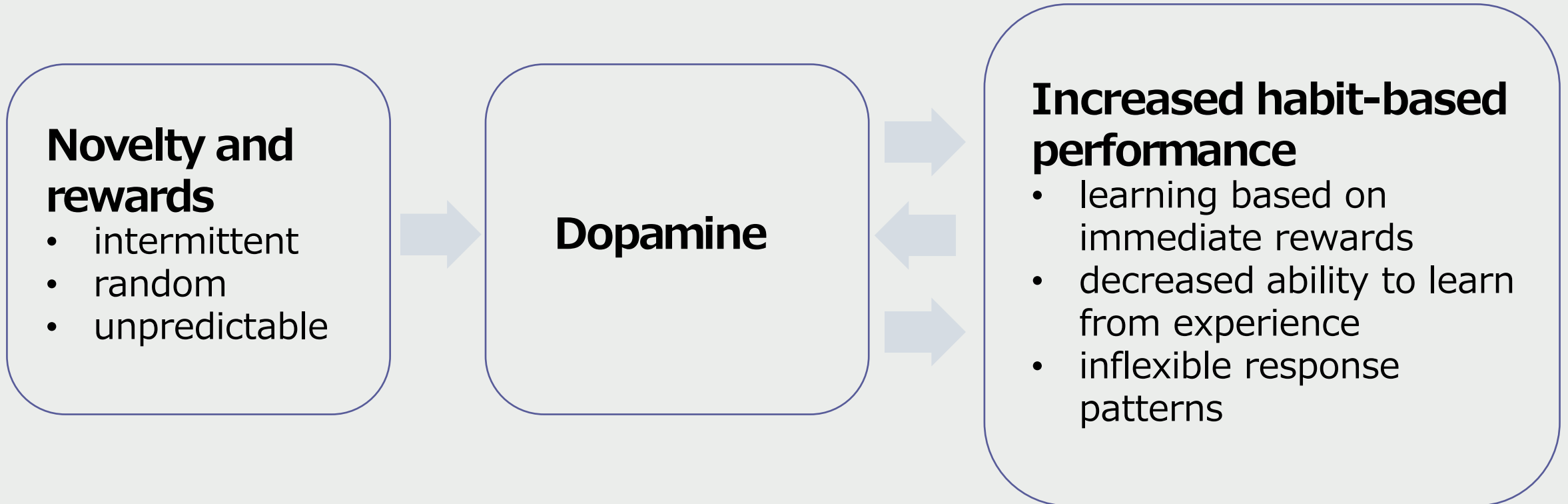
## **Dopamine**



## **Sensitization**

- increases motivational drive
- narrows scope of motivational drives

# Increased Habit-Based Performance



# Reward Processing

(Balodis et al., 2016)

- Liking to wanting
- Decrease impact of “natural rewards”
- Preoccupation, salience of cues
- Stopping gambling or drug use may result in anhedonia
- Also, less activity in the top-down control network
- Harder to notice “stop” signals and put on brakes for new addictive behaviors

# BIOLOGY AND PHARMACOLOGY

## *Pharmacology*

# **Pharmaco- therapy Studies and Problem Gambling**

## **WHAT IS BEING MEDICATED?**

**Withdrawal symptoms**

**Emotional consequences of gambling**

**Craving**

**Blocking response**

**Affect triggers**

**Impulsivity**

# MEDICATION FOR CO-MORBIDITY

Affective disorders

ADHD

Anxiety disorder

## Pharmaco- therapy Studies and Problem Gambling





**Pharmaco-  
therapy  
Studies and  
Problem  
Gambling**

Anti-depressants

Mood stabilizers

Anti-psychotics

Opioid antagonists

N-acetyl cysteine

*What appears to work quite well?*

# Recent Literature Review

(Goslar et al., 2019)

**Placebo controlled studies:**

Opioid antagonists

Mood stabilizers  
(particularly  
topiramate)

Combined with  
cognitive  
intervention

Lithium for GD  
plus bipolar

# Medications That May Trigger Excessive Behaviors

With any individual, medications may contribute to adverse behavioral issues.

- Dopamine agonist medications; (Mirapex, L-dopa, Requip)
- Aripiprazole (Abilify, Abilify Maintena, Aristada)

(Grosset et al., 2006; Lader, 2008; Moore et al., 2014; U.S. Food and Drug Administration, 2016)



# Problem Gambling Screens

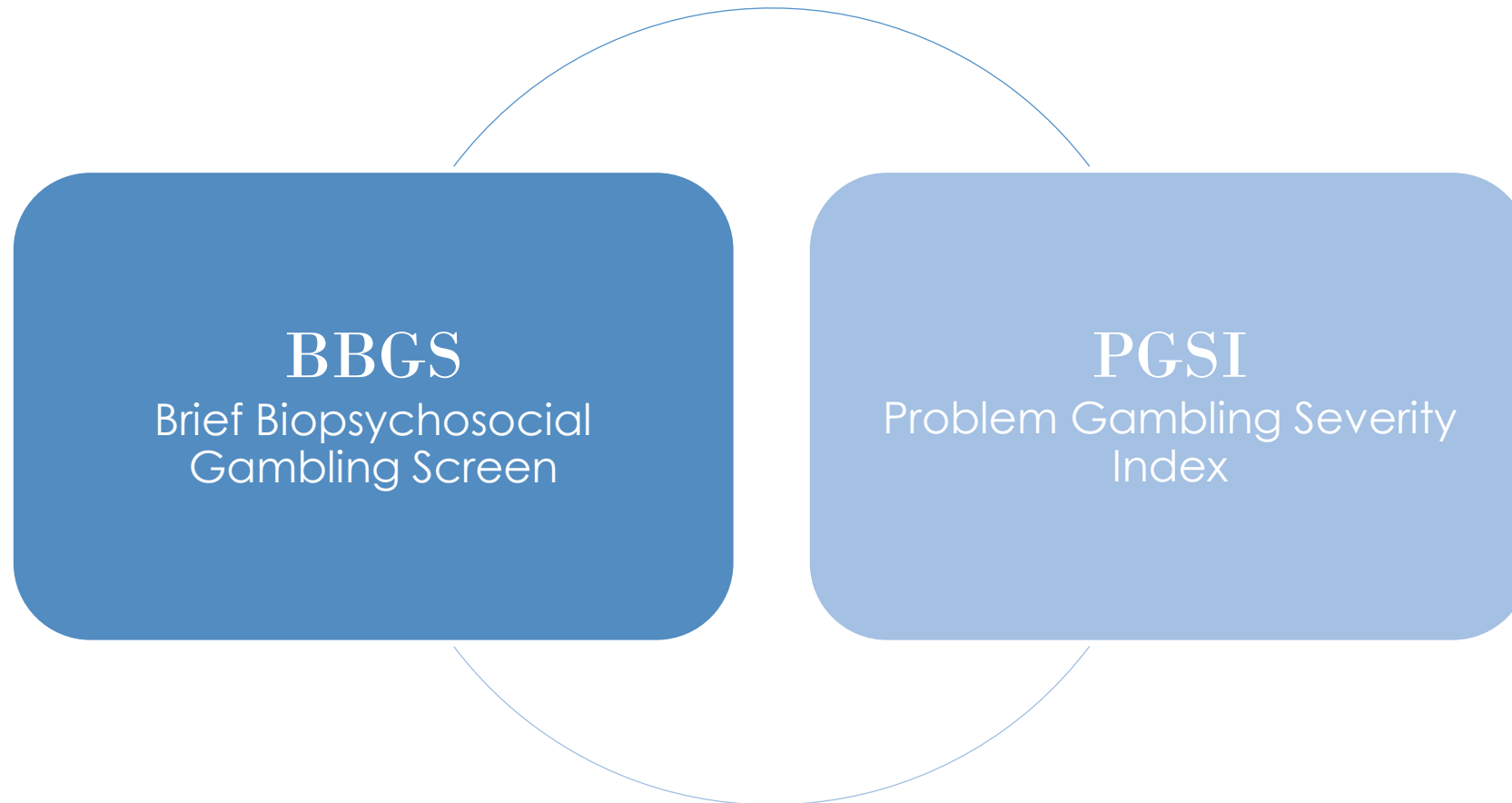
# Q Why screen for gambling disorder?

- A
- Evidence of high-risk of gambling problems among individuals diagnosed with substance use and mental health disorders.
  - Gambling disorder may lead to financial, emotional, social, occupational, and physical harms.
  - As many as 10% of primary care patients report lifetime gambling disorder.
  - People with gambling-related problems are more likely to smoke, consume excessive amounts of caffeine, have more emergency department visits, and be obese.
  - Many cases of gambling disorder go undetected, because of limited assessment for this problem.

***Early intervention and treatment work!***

# Screening Tools

PROBLEM GAMBLING  
SCREENS



# Brief Biosocial Gambling Screen (Gebauer et al., 2010)

- During the past 12 months, have you become restless, irritable or anxious when trying to stop/cut down on gambling?
- During the past 12 months, have you tried to keep your family or friends from knowing how much you gambled?
- During the past 12 months, did you have such financial trouble as a result of your gambling that you had to get help with living expenses from family, friends or welfare?

# Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI)

(Ferris & Wynne, 2001)

PROBLEM GAMBLING  
SCREENS

*Thinking about the last 12 months...*

1. Have you bet more than you could really afford to lose?
2. Still thinking about the last 12 months, have you needed to gamble with larger amounts of money to get the same feeling of excitement?
3. When you gambled, did you go back another day to try to win back the money you lost?
4. Have you borrowed money or sold anything to get money to gamble?
5. Have you felt that you might have a problem with gambling?
6. Has gambling caused you any health problems, including stress or anxiety?
7. Have people criticized your betting or told you that you had a gambling problem, regardless of whether or not you thought it was true?
8. Has your gambling caused any financial problems for you or your household?
9. Have you felt guilty about the way you gamble or what happens when you gamble?

Never = 0    Sometimes = 1    Most of the time = 2    Almost always = 3



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