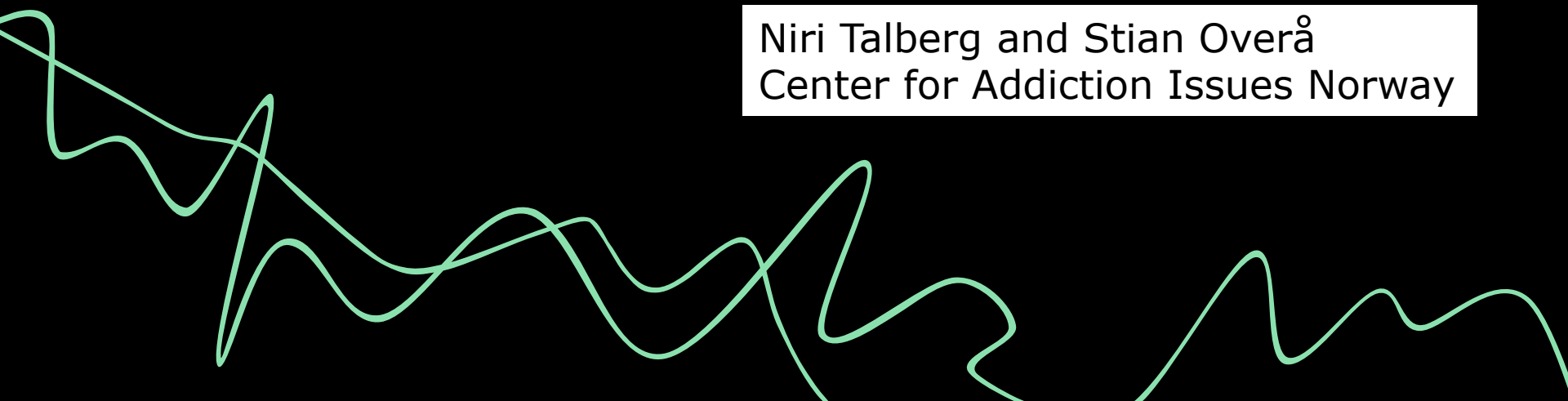


Why did it take you so long to seek help?

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

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

Niri Talberg and Stian Overå  
Center for Addiction Issues Norway





## Background

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

**Only 5-12 %** of those with problems (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?**

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## **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**



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

Will from 2023-2028 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 that does not seek treatment.

Two meetings each year with our reference group : 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.

Weekly meetings with the gambling help line and remote treatment therapist

WP	Method	Sample
<b>A – the players’ stories</b>	Narrative interviews with players who have received treatment or considered seeking help but have chosen not to seek treatment.	8-18 narrative interviews Collected 11 (8 male) and 3 follow up int
<b>B–The first meeting with professional helpers</b>	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.
<b>C – TSB interdisciplinary specialized treatment - CBT</b>	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 Our next study
<b>D – Public low threshold treatment</b>	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
<b>E – Self-help groups</b>	The 3 researchers will each observe 1 group session from 3 different self-help	9 observations of group sessions 3 interviews with group leaders



## Why did it take you so long to seek help?

Phase 1  
Exited

- Action
- Entertainment

Phase 2  
Desperate

- The dream of winning it all back
- The hole becomes bigger

Phase 3  
Num

- Shame, Stigma
- Escape

Post gambling hangover, very alive, nothing left to lose. A relief. - Has to give up the dream of winning it all back and ready to work on post trauma to be ready for treatment.



## The dream of winning 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. Before I didn't get the last consumer loan because I was just going to win back. And if I had gotten the consumer loan, I would just keep going.*

# 6

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### **The hole becomes bigger**

*That's what we gambling addicts struggle with that we want to win it back, but then you dig down more and more and the tunnel vision comes in and 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.*

#11



## Shame – barrier to seek help

*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?*





## Finally reach 0

*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

*The money burns in my pocket and in the account, and it is such an extreme feeling that there are many times when I just have, 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, and then the account says 0, then peace comes, then I can relax, then I can think , then in a way I can live.*

#3

*Side note: Some have told us that they think they could gamble again without losing control as long as they dont win.*



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

- No one regretted opening up many was surprised that they was so positively met
- Next of kin 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 was more open about the problem and the partner demanded controll 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 and she who was the group leader she lived nearby and came over the next day. #1*

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

*Very good first meeting was that I called in and told my situation and I talked to someone there for three hours and told my situation. 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





## **Remote based treatment – phone calls and assignments online (12 weeks)**

### **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 that they do such a thorough job in relation to what you have answered the week before so that you feel that you are taken seriously when you talk to them the week after, then you realize that they have done a proper job based on what you have answered the week before then. So it was very, very good.# 5*





TSB - interdisciplinary specialized treatment. Groups or individual therapy

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

The treatment system is difficult to navigate, hard to wait, sometimes the therapist have little knowledge about gambling or the wrong therapy focus.

Chemistry is important

Preference towards group treatment





Say what they want to hear if you don't believe in treatment

*I started playing [physical] slot machines, then it took off when I started online. Then the big bad wolf came out. I had a round of treatment in 2014, but then I lied throughout the treatment. I went a few weeks without gambling, but it was nothing.*

...

*Why did you lie your way through treatment?*

*It was the wrong kind of therapy focus; it was very much about cognitive therapy ... I knew everything from before. The treatment was too much systematic and too little challenging I have heard that Blue Cross is more at finding motivation.*

#1



## Other tentative results (themes)

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

Computer games as first addiction

Freespins leads 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 for 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.

Crypto currency to avoid transfer ban

Problem gambling a lonely activity – Other gambling social

Active marketing – WhatsApp

**KORUS**

Øst

[Niri@sykehuset-innlandet.no](mailto:Niri@sykehuset-innlandet.no)

[Stian.overa@sykehuset-innlandet.no](mailto:Stian.overa@sykehuset-innlandet.no)