

# Behavioural addictions research past & present: A bibliographic review

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## Introduction

The phrase “behavioural addiction” starts to appear in academic articles in the late 1980s and early 1990s (e.g., Alexander & Schweighofer, 1988). Soon after, Jaffe (1990) made the argument that the term “addiction” was being used too liberally—it was being applied to many non-drug-related behaviours and there was a risk of “*trivializing dependence*”. These concerns did little to stem the expanding definition of the term. Since Jaffe’s 1990 article the net of addiction has been cast wider and wider, capturing increasingly more repetitive or compulsive behaviour patterns.

Fears that the term addiction will lose its seriousness or weight remain heightened today (). These may be justified—individuals who experience addictions to opioid-based drugs or alcohol can suffer serious, life-threatening harm and withdrawal episodes. Assigning the same label to describe their experience and someone who has a largely inconsequential difficulty controlling their spending or screen use could indeed trivialise the condition. Yet, there is increasing evidence that people are compulsively engaging with behaviours like gambling (), gaming (), smart phones (), and exercise () in a way that resembles substance addictions. Neuroscientific studies have indicated that the neurobiology underlying substance and behavioural addictions may also be similar (see ...).

Buoyed by this evidence, clinicians and researchers have lobbied for increased recognition of behavioural addictions as official mental health diagnoses. Success in this endeavour was most notable in 2013 when the American Psychological Association included *Gambling Disorder* as a behavioural addiction in the fifth edition of the Diagnostic & Statistical Manual of mental disorders (DSM-5) under the rubric of . More recently in 2018,

While the addition of Gambling Disorder to the DSM-5 appears to have been widely accepted as a positive step forward, the addition of Gaming Disorder to the ICD-11 has been met with contention.

Such concerns are not unique to the addiction field. “Psychiatrization” and “concept creep” have been used to describe the seemingly ever-widening definitions of mental health disorders, abuse, and trauma, as well as the “medicalisation” of these in the form of over-diagnosis and treatment (Haslam, 2016; Haslam et al., 2021).

Whilst I’m aware of some bizarre publications on this topic (like [this 2015 study](#) on fortune telling addiction), ... the extent to which this is really occurring in the addictions field.

## Methods

### Design

kay, so my goal here was to try and find every peer-reviewed paper that has ever discussed a behaviour (e.g., gaming, social media use etc.) as a form of addiction. Well, every paper published on the PubMed database. I chose PubMed for two reasons:

1. it indexes around 30,000 different journals/outlets, including most of the journals that I know publish research in this area
2. the search results and article data can be automatically downloaded using the **rentrez** R package (trying to manually download summary data for every study ever published on behavioural addictions would be prohibitively time consuming!).

So, I first developed and trialed a PubMed search string to try and identify relevant papers on each behavioural addiction (e.g., “social-network-use disorder” OR “social media addiction”). After trialing and refining each search string on the PubMed site, I used **rentrez** to pull the results from the search string for every “addiction” I could find, individually screening the results for duplicates or irrelevant articles (e.g., errata).

I used a combination of personal knowledge of this area, results from PubMed searches for other addictions, and Google searches for phrases akin to “bizarre addictions” (a very systematic approach) to identify the different types of “addiction” to search for.

### Search & selection process

### Data analysis

#### Number of behavioural addiction articles on PubMed

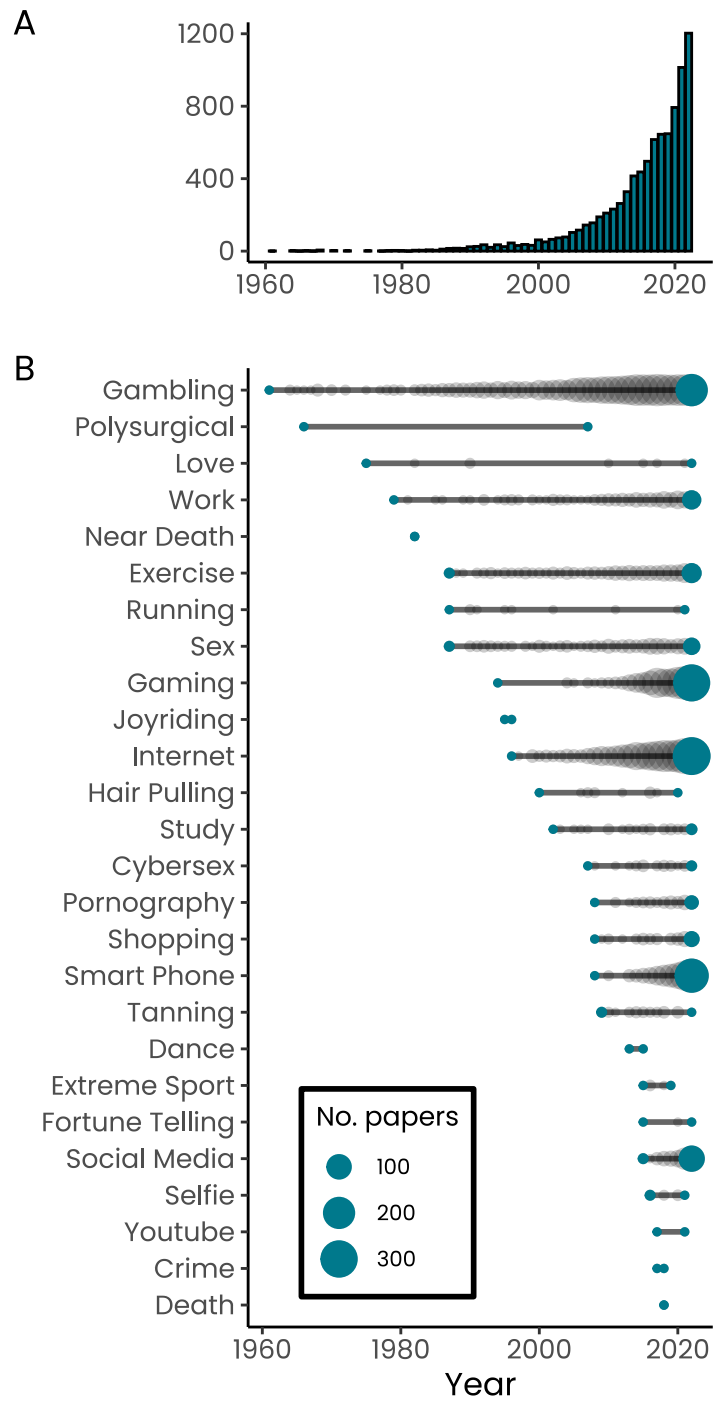
*Up to end of 2022*

Behavioural addiction	N	%
Gambling	3372	32.45
Internet	2154	20.73

Gaming	1401	13.48
Behavioural Addictions	1320	12.70
Smart Phone	753	7.25
Exercise	351	3.38
Work	262	2.52
Sex	255	2.45
Social Media	245	2.36
Shopping	67	0.64
Pornography	61	0.59
Study	33	0.32
Tanning	29	0.28
Cybersex	26	0.25
Hair Pulling	13	0.13
Running	10	0.10
Love	9	0.09
Selfie	8	0.08
Extreme Sport	6	0.06
Fortune Telling	3	0.03
Youtube	2	0.02
Crime	2	0.02
Dance	2	0.02
Joyriding	2	0.02
Polysurgical	2	0.02
Death	1	0.01
Near Death	1	0.01

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## Results



## Discussion

## References

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