

Behavioural addictions research past & present: A bibliographic review

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Abstract

"... there is no basis for linking the word 'addiction' to drug habits. Nor is there a basis for assuming that the most severe addictions necessarily involve drugs."

B.K. Alexander & R. F. Schweighofer (1988)

Introduction

The phrase “behavioural addiction” first appears in ...’s seminal 1990 editorial and the series of commentaries that followed (). However, the notion that someone can be addicted to “activities” (e.g., Alexander & Schweighofer, 1988), not substances, predates these articles by at least several decades. Parallels between compulsive gambling and substance addictions can be found in articles from. (). OTHER ADDICTIONS RECOGNISED BEFORE 1990

Immediately following ...’s 1990 editorial, Jaffe [1990; (1)] argued the term “addiction” was already being used too liberally—it was being applied to many non-drug-related behaviours and there was a risk of “*trivializing dependence*”. These concerns appear to have done little to stem addiction’s expanding definition. Since 1990, an increasingly greater number of repetitive or compulsive behaviour patterns have been proffered as addictions. These include... and even fortune telling (2,3).

Fears that the term addiction will lose its seriousness or weight remain heightened today (4). 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 (), smartphone use (), and exercise () in a way that resembles substance addictions. Parallels have been observed in the symptoms (), antecedents and correlates (), and underlying neurobiology of drug and non-drug addictions (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 (5). More recently in 2018, *Gaming Disorder* was added to the 11th edition of the International Classification of Diseases (6).

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. BEAN ET AL> and key points in this debate.

Re-ignited fears that non-pathological behaviour patterns may be...

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 concern has been expressed about the form of “concept creep” occurring in the behavioural addictions field [e.g., (4)], there has been no attempt to systematically investigate this trend and “take stock” of research in the field. The number of novel addictions formally investigated remains unclear. As does the extent to which each purported addiction has been studied relative to the more established gambling and gaming disorders. **WHY IS THIS AN ISSUE. This precludes.... and...** The aim of this bibliographic review was, therefore, to:

[1] identify the total number of different behavioural addictions formally studied in peer-reviewed articles

[2] determine the number of such articles focused on each proposed addiction and the characteristics of these articles (e.g., years of publications, range of geographic locations)

[3] determine the relative strength of evidence for each addiction.

Methods

PRISMA

A novel, exploratory approach was to identify relevant behavioural addictions and related articles. As such, pre-registration of the methods was not deemed appropriate or possible.

An important assumption that underlay the methods used here was that

Search & selection process

The review was divided into two phases. The first aimed to identify all potential behavioural addictions that *may* have been formally studied in peer-reviewed articles. This was achieved via internet-based searches of terms such as “new behavioural addiction” and “novel behavioural addictions”, as well as scans of academic blogs (e.g., <https://drmarkgriffiths.wordpress.com/>).

Terms for these novel addictions were collated and combined with diagnostic terms for more established behavioural addictions. For example, *Gambling Disorder* from the DSMs-5 (5), *Pathological Gambling* from DSM-IV, and *Gaming Disorder* from ICD-11 (6).

In Phase 2, the terms derived from the first phase were used in searches of the PubMed database. PubMed was selected for two reasons. First, it indexes more than 30,000 different journals/outlets, including most that publish behavioural addiction research (e.g., *Addiction*, *Journal of Behavioural Addictions*, *Addictive Behaviours*). Second, search results and article data can be automatically downloaded using the **rentrez** R package, allowing for efficient extraction of data on a large scale—in this case, all articles ever published on behavioural addictions in the database.

Search strings for each behavioural addiction were first trialled and refined using the PubMed “Advanced search” function online. Once a string was finalised, all results returned using it were screened for relevance at title and abstract level. To be included in the review, an article was required to:

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The title and PMID (PubMed ID) of irrelevant articles were noted and later removed (see Data extraction section below).

Data extraction

used **rentrez** to pull the results from searches.

individually screening the results for duplicates or irrelevant articles (e.g., errata).

Data analysis

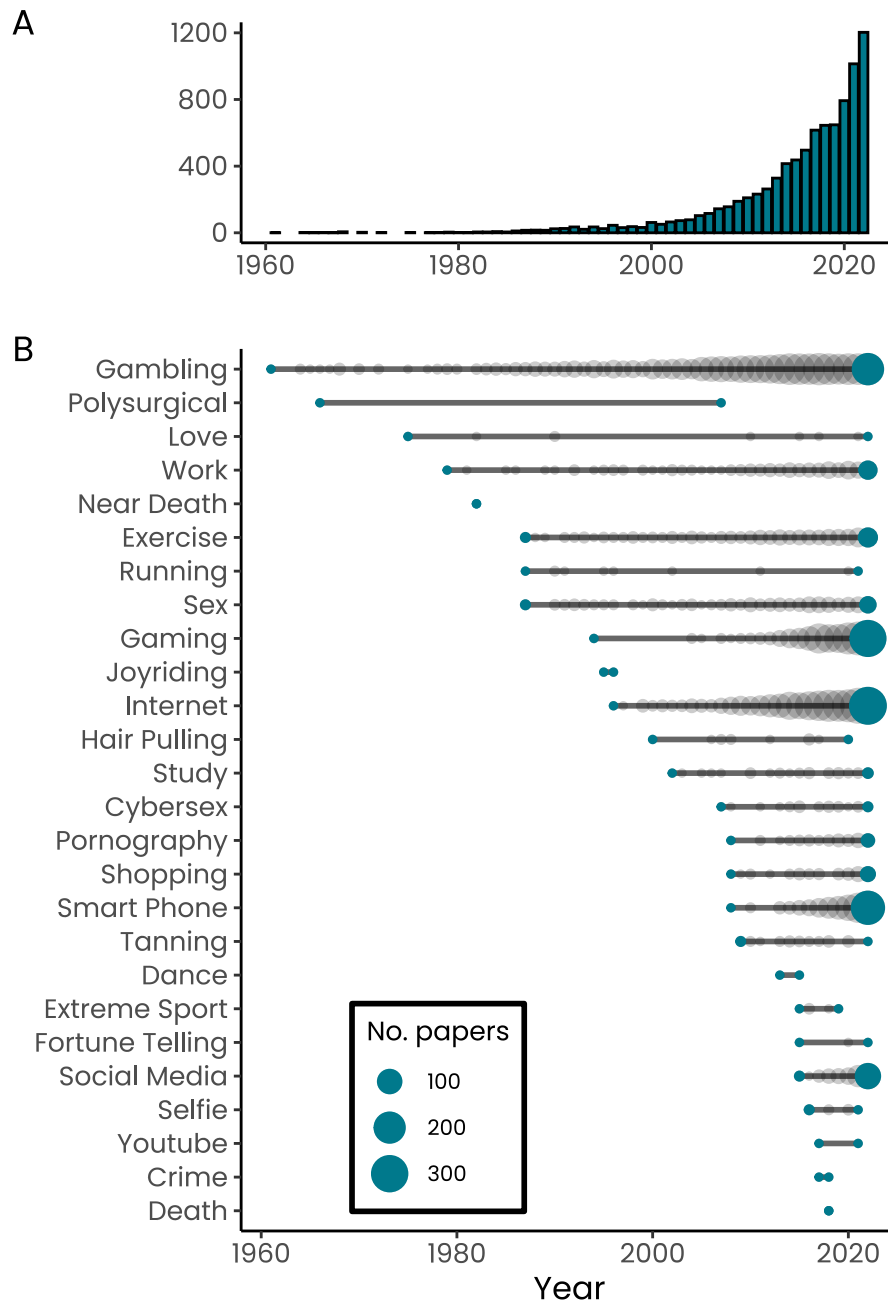
Number of behavioural addiction articles on PubMed

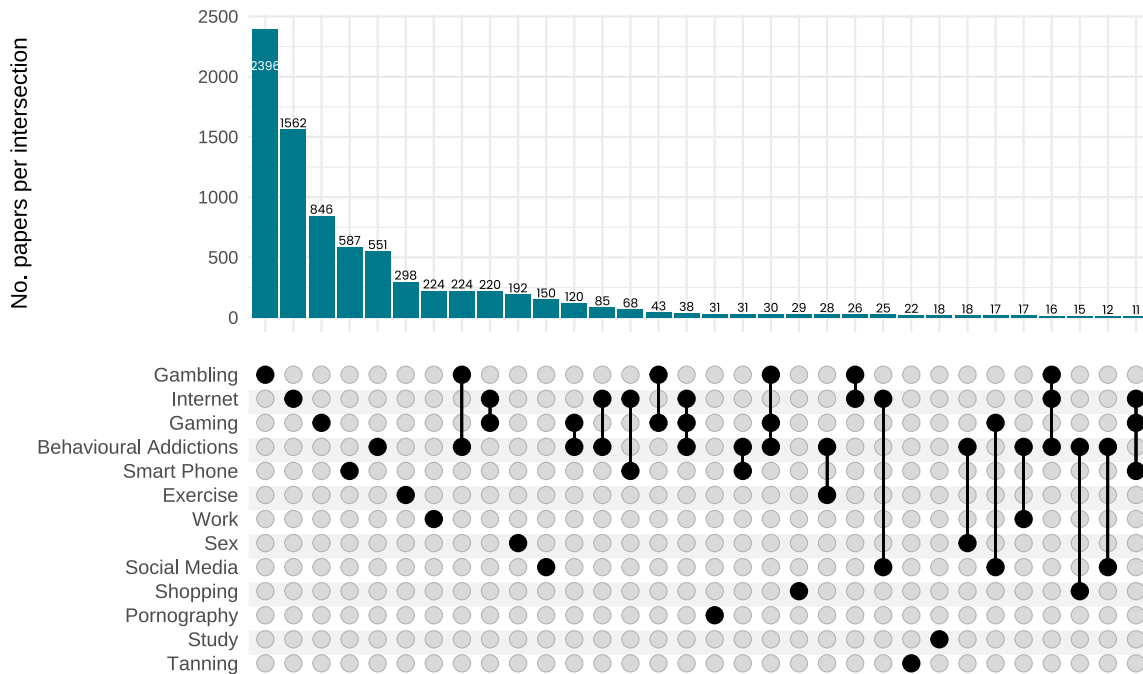
Up to end of 2022

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

Results





Discussion

"I found myself saying to our driver: 'Green, did you know that I am an addict'? He is of the old school so that he did not turn his head. 'No, sir, I did not know that'. 'I am addicted to at least one good experment a day—sometimes I can arrange it by telephone. When I cannot, the world goes out of focus, becomes unreal'. Possibly somewhat dissapointed, but cearly relieved: 'I see, sir'."

E. H. Land in *Addiction as Necessity and Opportunity* (1971).

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