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ATTENTIONAL BIAS IN PATHOLOGICAL GAMBLING. A REVIEW

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Rationale: Pathological gambling (PG) is a relatively prevalent psychiatric disorder, which is included in the category of Impulse Control Disorders of the DSM-IV TR. It's prevalence is 1%. Dopamine is the main neurotransmitter involved in it. Attentional bias (AB) is a phenomenon whereby attentional channelling is directed toward personally valued stimuli, despite an individual's efforts to ignore them. AB have been previously described in several Substance Use Disorders (SUD) such as alcoholism and cocaine use disorders.

Objectives: The objective of this study was to investigate the current evidence of the presence of AB associated to PG.

Methods: We performed a systematic search in PubMed (1980-Present) to identify publications that examined the existence of AB in PG.

Results: To date, two studies have found the existence of an AB in pathological gamblers. Both studies have been performed using a modified Stroop procedure, and report that gamblers show an automatic interference when naming the color of gambling-related words.

Conclusions: PG could be conceptualized as an addictive behavior and we can hypothesize a link between addiction and automaticity. There is a relationship between AB (cognitive dimension) and subjective craving (emotional dimension), so that high levels of craving can be both, a cause of, and a consequence of, an elevation of AB of gambling-related cues.

Even so, there is little research in this field to date. Further studies are warranted using new paradigms for the assessment of AB in PG.