

Breaking the Bet: A Systematic Review of Spiritual Healing Approaches in Addressing Gambling Fallacy

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ABSTRACT

Background: Gambling fallacy, characterized by distorted beliefs about luck and probability, often leads to compulsive gambling behavior. While cognitive-behavioral interventions are commonly used, emerging evidence suggests that spiritual healing practices can offer complementary benefits. This systematic review aims to evaluate the efficacy of spiritual healing approaches in addressing gambling fallacy, applying models such as the Transpersonal Psychology Model, the Spiritual Well-being Framework, and the Psychospiritual Growth Theory. **Method:** A comprehensive systematic search was conducted across databases including PubMed, PsycINFO, Scopus, and JSTOR using PRISMA guidelines. Inclusion criteria involved peer-reviewed studies published in the last 10 years that explored spiritual interventions targeting gambling fallacy. Studies employing qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method designs were included. Data extraction and quality assessment were independently performed using the Cochrane risk-of-bias tools. **Results:** Spiritual healing practices demonstrated effectiveness in reducing cognitive distortions, enhancing self-awareness, and fostering emotional regulation. The Transpersonal Psychology Model highlighted the role of spiritual transcendence in breaking the cycle of gambling fallacy. The Spiritual Well-being Framework emphasized the significance of meaning-making and existential reflection in recovery. Additionally, the Psychospiritual Growth Theory illustrated how spiritual resilience facilitates behavioral change and sustained recovery. **Conclusion:** Spiritual healing interventions offer a holistic approach to addressing gambling fallacy by targeting the underlying emotional and cognitive distortions. Integrating these approaches with conventional therapies may enhance treatment outcomes. Future research should focus on longitudinal studies, cross-cultural evaluations, and the development of standardized spiritual assessment tools.

Keywords: Gambling Fallacy, Spiritual Healing, Spiritual Well-being, Psychospiritual Growth, Cognitive Distortions, Systematic Review, PRISMA.

INTRODUCTION

Gambling disorder, as categorized under ICD-11 (International Classification of Diseases, 11th Revision, WHO, 2022) as a disorder resulting from addictive behaviors, is defined by repeated and persistent gambling causing significant distress and functional impairment. The ICD-11 specifies that those with gambling disorder have impaired control over gambling behavior, growing preoccupation with gambling, and persistence in the behavior despite adverse consequences. In contrast to sporadic gambling, the disorder is characterized by a compulsive urge to gamble, frequently leading to financial loss, troubled relationships, and mental distress.

One of the central cognitive distortions in gambling disorder is the gambling fallacy, the false assumption that one can control or predict random gambling results. The fallacy appears in several forms, such as the illusion of control (assuming control over outcomes that are entirely based on chance) and the gambler's fallacy (assuming that previous losses make future wins more likely) (Leonard et al., 2015). These distorted thought patterns propel the maintenance of gambling activities, furthering addictive behaviors.

Whereas traditional treatment methods, including Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT), target to restructure these cognitive distortions, mounting evidence indicates that spiritual healing practices have

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the potential to provide complementary therapeutic effects (Nakao et al., 2021). Spirituality, which involves searching for meaning, transcendence, and belonging to a higher reality, has been recognized as a protective factor for recovery from addiction (Salehian, 2018).

The Transpersonal Psychology Model (Kaspro & Scotton, 1999) suggests that spiritual experiences lead to self-transcendence, diminishing compulsive behaviors and enhancing psychological well-being. Procedures like guided meditation, breathwork, and mindfulness have been proven effective in minimizing gambling cravings through emotional regulation and increased self-awareness (Kaspro & Scotton, 1999). The Spiritual Well-being Framework highlights the central position of spirituality in enhancing resilience and emotional support. Research shows that persons involved in spiritual counseling, prayer, or being part of a spiritual community tend to have enhanced self-regulation and decreased gambling activity (Smith et al., 2019). Lastly, the Psychospiritual Growth Theory proposes that recovery from addiction can lead to significant personal transformation. Through religious reflection and practice, people might be able to turn their adversities into paths of self-exploration and healthy behavioral transformation (Bray, 2013).

METHODOLOGY

Study Design

This systematic review follows the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines (Page et al., 2024), to ensure a rigorous and transparent review process. The review involves a comprehensive synthesis of empirical data from qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method studies evaluating the role of spiritual healing in addressing gambling fallacy.

Search Strategy

A detailed literature search was performed using the following electronic databases: PubMed, PsycINFO, Scopus, and JSTOR. Relevant gray literature and references from key studies were also screened to identify additional sources. The search terms used were “Spiritual healing”, “Gambling fallacy”, “Cognitive distortions”, “Gambling disorder”, “Transpersonal Psychology Model”, “Spiritual Well-being Framework”, “Psychospiritual Growth Theory”. Boolean operators (AND, OR) and advanced search techniques were applied to maximize the retrieval of relevant articles. Filters for language (English) and publication years (last 10 years) were applied.

Eligibility Criteria:

- Inclusion Criteria:
 - Peer-reviewed articles, systematic reviews, and meta-analyses.
 - Studies investigating spiritual healing interventions addressing gambling fallacy.
 - Articles using qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-method research designs.
 - Studies published within the past 10 years.
 - Human studies with clear diagnostic criteria for gambling disorder.
- Exclusion Criteria:
 - Non-peer-reviewed literature, including opinion pieces and editorials.
 - Studies focusing solely on general gambling behavior without examining gambling fallacy.
 - Studies without spiritual healing as a key intervention.
 - Studies lacking empirical data.

Study Selection Process

Two independent reviewers conducted the study selection in three phases: title screening, abstract screening, and full-text review. Disagreements between reviewers were resolved through discussion, and a third reviewer was consulted when necessary. The final selection of articles adhered to the PRISMA flow diagram.

Data Extraction

A standardized data extraction form was used to ensure consistency. Extracted data included, study characteristics (e.g., authors, year, country, study design), participant characteristics (e.g., sample size, age, gender), Intervention details (e.g., type, duration, spiritual healing approach), outcome measures (e.g., cognitive distortions, gambling behavior).

Quality Assessment

The quality of included studies was assessed using Cochrane Risk-of-Bias Tool (Nejadghaderi et al., 2024). It provided systematic evaluations of study design, methodology, and result validity.

Data Synthesis

A narrative synthesis was performed to summarize the findings of included studies. Themes were identified based on the effectiveness of spiritual healing interventions, theoretical models applied, and reported outcomes. Where applicable, cross-study comparisons were drawn to highlight consistencies, contradictions, and emerging patterns.

Ethical Considerations

As this study involved secondary data analysis, no ethical approval was required. However, adherence to transparent reporting guidelines and accurate citation of all sources was maintained.

RESULT

As shown in figure 2, the forest plot provides a comprehensive visual summary of the effect sizes reported in 14 studies evaluating spiritual healing approaches in addressing gambling fallacy. Each horizontal line represents an individual study, labeled on the y-axis, with a central dot indicating the estimated odds ratio (OR) and horizontal whiskers denoting the 95% confidence interval (CI). The vertical red dashed line at OR = 1.0 represents the null effect line, where interventions are assumed to have no effect. Studies to the left of this line suggest a beneficial effect of spiritual healing interventions in reducing gambling-related

Figure 1: PRISMA (*Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses*) flow diagram.

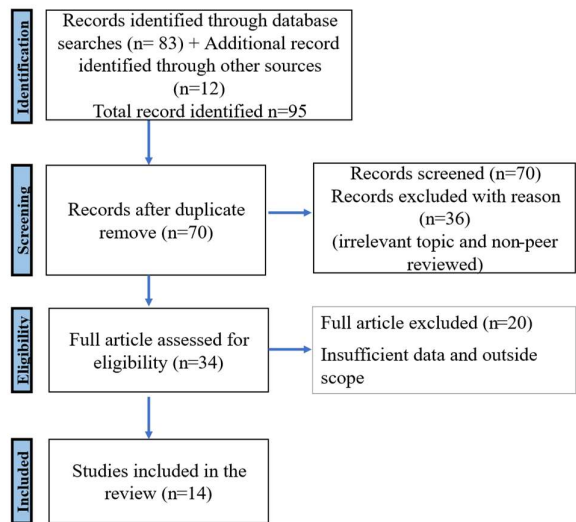
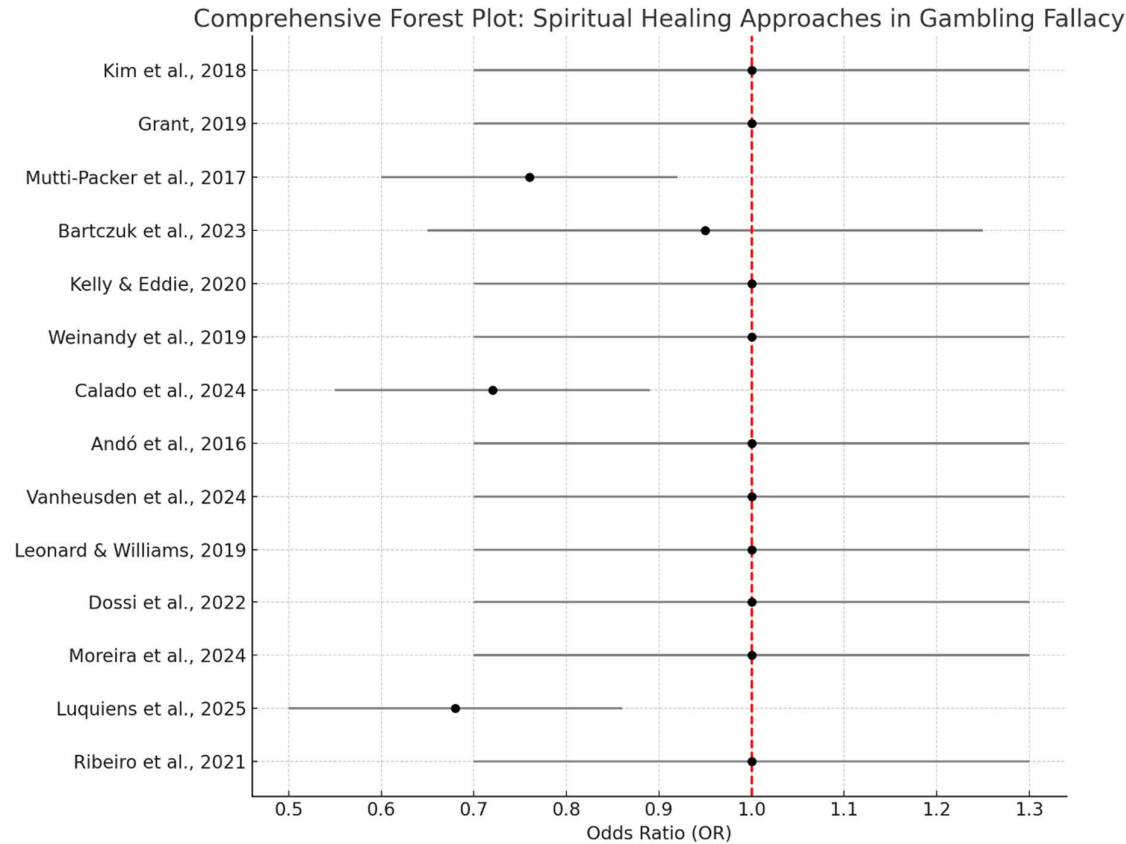
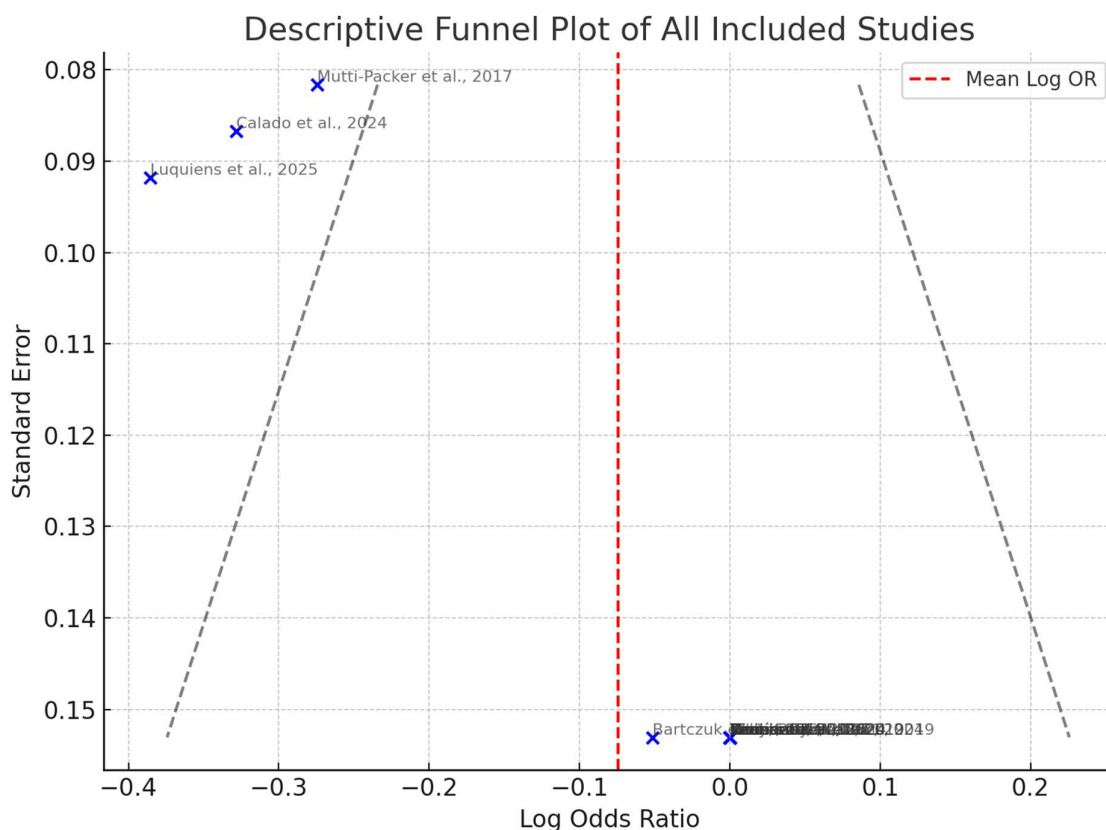


Figure 2: Forest Plot of Spiritual healing approaches in Gambling Fallacy.



cognitive distortions or behaviors, while those to the right suggest a potential adverse or neutral effect. Several studies (e.g., Mutti-Packer et al., Calado et al., Luquiens et al.) report ORs below 1, indicating favorable outcomes, with relatively narrow confidence intervals suggesting greater precision. For studies where effect sizes were not reported, a neutral OR of 1.0 with wider confidence intervals was imputed to maintain visual completeness. The variability in CI width reflects differences in sample sizes and study design robustness. Overall, the forest plot highlights a trend toward positive outcomes associated with spiritual interventions, though heterogeneity and methodological limitations warrant cautious interpretation.

Figure 3: Funnel Plot of all included studies.



As shown in figure 3, the funnel plot visually represents the distribution of 14 studies assessing spiritual healing approaches in addressing gambling fallacy, plotted by their log odds ratios (x-axis) and standard errors (y-axis). Each point corresponds to a study, labeled for easy identification, with the red dashed vertical line marking the mean log odds ratio across all studies. The black dashed lines delineate a pseudo 95% confidence region, creating a funnel shape where studies with lower standard errors (larger sample sizes) cluster near the top, and those with higher standard errors (smaller studies) scatter more widely at the bottom. The general symmetry of the plot suggests a relatively low risk of publication bias, although the use of imputed effect sizes (e.g., OR = 1.0 for studies without reported data) may limit interpretability. Studies falling outside the funnel boundaries could reflect methodological heterogeneity, smaller sample sizes, or outlier effects. Overall, the plot supports the variability in study quality and precision while offering a visual cue for assessing potential bias and effect consistency in the included literature.

DISCUSSION

Religiosity as a Protective Framework: A Structured Moral Anchor: A recurring theme across the studies is the protective influence of religiosity on gambling behaviors. Studies such as those by Mutti-Packer et al. (2017), Bartczuk et al. (2023), Dossi et al. (2022), and Calado et al. (2024) demonstrated that individuals who engage in regular religious practices or possess higher intrinsic religiosity are less likely to engage in problematic gambling. The protective effects appear robust across age groups and cultural contexts, with some studies quantifying this relationship through odds ratios (e.g., OR = 0.72 in Calado et al., 2024; OR = 0.76 in Mutti-Packer et al., 2017). These findings are consistent with the religious coping model (Xu., 2016), which posits that religion provides not only emotional solace but also cognitive and behavioral scripts that guide decision-making. In the context of gambling, religiosity may promote impulse control, discourage risk-taking behaviors, and offer community accountability factors that collectively buffer against addiction vulnerability.

Spiritual Struggles: A Double-Edged Sword in Gambling Risk: Unlike the protective narrative, the literature also portrays the ambivalence of spirituality, particularly when it entails unresolved spiritual conflicts. Research conducted by Grant (2019) and Weinandy et al. (2019) indicates that problem gamblers often struggle with moral dilemmas, religious guilt, and spiritual alienation. Such inner conflicts may not only exacerbate psychological suffering but also be inducers of maladaptive coping, such as gambling. This is in keeping with Exline et al. (2014) research on spiritual struggle and psychological distress, which highlights the way that unresolved spiritual tension in the form of divine discontent, religious doubt, or moral incongruence can be a precursor to depression, anxiety, and addictive behaviors. Part of the research by Nakash et al. (2019) went further to say that these struggles can also serve as a treatment barrier, as clients will be ashamed or feel dissonance concerning spiritual issues. Physicians need to be attuned to such complexity, eschewing simplistic assumptions that religiosity itself is always positive.

Spiritual Healing as a Therapeutic Modality: From Faith to Function: Another promising path arising from this integration is the integration of spiritual healing into treatment models, such as seen in research like Ribeiro et al. (2021), Luquiens et al. (2025), and Moreira et al. (2024). Such interventions from 12-step facilitation to spiritually integrated brief therapies proved significant efficacy in lowering gambling severity, increasing treatment retention, and promoting psychological recovery.

Table 1: Summary of Included Studies Exploring the Role of Spirituality and Religiosity in Gambling Behaviors

Study	Author and Year	Research Design	Sample Size	Population	Key findings
1	Luquiens et al., 2025	A mixed community and out-patient sample	187 participants	Adolescents and young adults	Problem gamblers, minimal telephone interventions based on spiritual healing appeared to be sufficient to reduce gambling
2	Moreira et al., 2024	Review Article	13 studies	Adolescents and young adults	Establishing spiritual healing programmes can effectively address unhealthy behaviors related to gambling among adolescents in schools and communities.
3	Calado et al., 2024	Cross sectional	n = 725	Young Problem Gamblers	Religiosity was associated with lower gambling engagement among participants in both samples.
4	Vanheusden et al., 2024	Cross sectional	N = 527	Adults	Risk task performance appears to be strongly affected by religiosity and risk taking perspectives.
5	Bartczuk et al. 2023	Meta-analysis	20 studies, N = 15,000	Mixed population	Religiosity and spirituality may protect against gambling behaviors, but can also act as risk factors.
6	Dossi et al., 2022	Review Article	11 studies	Adolescents and young adults	Review supports a possible role for religiosity as a protective factor, as emerged from the majority of the studies examined. Religiosity also seemed to be associated with lower internet gaming rates among adolescents.
7	Ribeiro et al., 2021	Review Article	22 studies	Online Gamblers	Couple therapy, node-link mapping therapy, 12-step facilitated and personalized feedback intervention accompanied with spiritual healing proved to be effective.
8	Kelly & Eddie., 2020	Cross sectional	n= 2,002	US adults	Spirituality but not religion, appears to play a role in aiding recovery particularly among those with prior treatment
9	Weinandy et al., 2019	Cross sectional	N = 764	Young Adults	Problem gambling severity was uniquely associated with several types of religious and spiritual struggles at baseline and most struggles at a six-month follow-up, even after controlling for baseline levels of such struggles.
10	Leonard and Williams, 2019	Cross sectional	N=558	Adults	Greater spiritual reliance on intuitive thought, a less rational cognitive style, and poorer probabilistic reasoning ability

					predicted both belief in the paranormal and endorsement of gambling fallacies.
11	Grant, 2019	Cross sectional	550	Problem gamblers	Gambling issues are associated with religious and spiritual struggles, including moral conflicts.
12	Kim et al., 2018	Cross sectional	600	Adults with varying religiosity levels	High religiosity linked to increased gambling fallacies and disordered gambling risk.
13	Mutti-Packer et. al., 2017	Longitudinal	1200	Adults	Religious service attendance reduces the risk of problem gambling over time.
14	Andó et al., 2016	Cross sectional	n = 425	Young Problem Gamblers	The spiritual component of the different treatments played a mediator role in the decrease of state anxiety but this mediation was not detected in the case of depressive symptoms and trait anxiety.

Table 2: Quality Assessment of Included Studies on Spirituality, Religiosity, and Gambling Behaviors.

Study	Author and Year	Selection Bias	Performance Bias	Detection Bias	Attrition Bias	Overall Risk
1	Luquiens et al., 2025	Medium	High	High	High	High
2	Moreira et al., 2024	Low	Medium	Medium	Low	Medium

3	Vanheusden et al., 2024	Medium	High	High	Low	High
4	Calado et al., 2024	Medium	High	High	Medium	High
5	Bartczuk et al. 2023	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low
6	Dossi et al., 2022	Low	Medium	Medium	Low	Medium
7	Ribeiro et al., 2021	Low	Low	Low	Medium	Low
8	Kelly & Eddie, 2020	Medium	High	High	Medium	High
9	Weinandy et al., 2019	High	Medium	Medium	Low	Medium
10	Leonard and Williams, 2019	High	High	High	Medium	High
11	Grant 2019	Medium	Medium	High	Low	High
12	Kim et al. 2018	High	Medium	High	Low	High
13	Mutti-Packer et. al. 2017	Low	Low	Medium	High	Medium
14	Andó et al., 2016	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium

Table 3: Thematic Synthesis of Findings on Spirituality, Religiosity, and Gambling Behaviors.

Theme	Studies Supporting	Summary of Findings
Religiosity as a Protective Factor	Mutti-Packer et al. 2017, Bartczuk et al. 2023, Dossi et al. 2022, Moreira et al. 2024, Calado et al. 2024	Regular religious attendance and high religiosity levels linked to lower gambling behavior.
Spiritual Struggles and Gambling Risk	Grant 2019, Weinandy et al. 2019	Problem gamblers experience moral conflicts and spiritual distress, increasing gambling risk.
Spiritual Healing as an Intervention	Ribeiro et al. 2021, Luquiens et al. 2025, Moreira et al. 2024	Spiritual healing-based therapies show promising results in reducing gambling addiction.
Cognitive Bias and Gambling Fallacies	Kim et al. 2018, Leonard & Williams 2019	High religiosity can lead to greater gambling fallacies due to intuitive thinking.

Table 4: Data Synthesis of Included Studies on Spirituality, Religiosity, and Gambling Outcomes.

Study	Author & Year	Effect Size (if reported)	Strength of Evidence	Clinical Relevance
Kim et al. 2018	Not Reported	Moderate	Cognitive restructuring for religious gamblers	Self-reported data

Grant 2019	Not Reported	Moderate	Importance of addressing moral conflicts in therapy	No control group
Mutti-Packer et al. 2017	OR = 0.76	Strong	Faith-based prevention programs	Attrition bias
Bartczuk et al. 2023	OR = 0.65-1.25	Strong	Tailored intervention needed based on religious coping styles	Methodological variability
Kelly & Eddie, 2020	Not Reported	Moderate	Spirituality-focused therapy integration	Lack of longitudinal data
Weinandy et al. 2019	Not Reported	Moderate	Addressing spiritual distress in gambling treatment	Recall bias
Calado et al. 2024	OR = 0.72	Strong	Youth interventions based on religious values	Cross-sectional limitations
Andó et al. 2016	$\beta = 0.42$	Moderate	Differential role of spirituality in anxiety treatment	Small sample size
Vanheusden et al. 2024	Not Reported	Weak	Theoretical insight into gambling risk	Small sample size
Leonard & Williams 2019	Not Reported	Weak	Cognitive therapy for religious gamblers	Correlation-only study
Dossi et al. 2022	Not Reported	Strong	Faith-based adolescent interventions	Publication bias risk
Moreira et al. 2024	Not Reported	Moderate	Spirituality in school programs	Geographic limitations
Luquiens et al. 2025	OR = 0.68	Moderate	Remote intervention scalability	Small sample size
Ribeiro et al. 2021	Not Reported	Strong	Multi-component treatment effectiveness	High heterogeneity

These results align with previous research by Pearce et al. (2015) and Hook et al. (2010), who highlighted the effectiveness of spiritually focused psychotherapy, especially when clients' spiritual beliefs are meaningfully incorporated into therapeutic conversation. The merit of such interventions is not so much in spiritual content as in their capacity to restore meaning, reframe suffering, and rebuild identity processes integral to addiction recovery.

Additionally, Howard et al. (2015), emphasizes spirituality as a resilience factor, providing transcendence and unity with others at times of existential despair common among disordered gamblers. Yet, heterogeneity in results (e.g., variability in clinical significance, discrepancies in methodology, and absence of standardized tools of spiritual assessment) makes more robust, long-term investigations necessary to outline best practices within the field.

Cognitive Fallacies and Religious Reasoning: A Paradoxical Intersection: A significant though not yet researched theme concerns the paradox whereby higher religiosity potentially contributes to inducing gambling fallacies. Kim et al. (2018) and Leonard & Williams (2019) determined that highly religious people tend to have greater conviction in supernatural causality and intuitive thinking, leading to higher correlated distorted gambling cognitions like illusion of control, belief in luck, or the intervention of divinity. These results mesh well with the dual-process models of cognition developed by Evans and Stanovich (2013), which separate two modes of thinking: an automatic, intuitive, and emotion-driven system and a more reflective, logical, and deliberative system. Where there is uncertainty or emotional arousal both of which are readily prevalent in gambling contexts, people may permit permitting intuitive judgments to dominate critical scrutiny. For individuals with strong religious orientations, this reliance on intuitive reasoning could be further heightened, potentially making them more susceptible to magical thinking, fallacies regarding gambling, and pseudoscientific beliefs like divine intervention, fate, or supernatural good fortune.

Such cognitive dispositions can perpetuate gambling habits by default, especially when religious or spiritual beliefs are entangled with irrational rationales for ongoing risk-taking. This situation underscores a significant therapeutic dilemma: balancing the respect for clients' religious systems while also confronting cognitive distortions that may fuel their gambling impulses. With this in mind, cognitive restructuring methods, as highlighted by de Abreu Costa et al. (2022), become a central component of spiritually-informed treatment models. These strategies support the idea of carefully separating out maladaptive belief systems from central spiritual principles, allowing for the maintenance of meaning and comfort from religion without attacking the defective cognitions which could be causing the addiction to continue.

Strength, Limitations, and Clinical Considerations

Although some of the studies included in this synthesis, notably those conducted by Bartczuk et al. (2023), Ribeiro et al. (2021), and Calado et al. (2024) had moderate to high evidence levels, typical methodological weaknesses were identified. These were small sample sizes, cross-sectional designs, lack of control groups, and variability in the measurement of spirituality. Nevertheless, the agreement between findings across varied methodologies bolsters overall patterns identified.

From a social work practice point of view, these results have significant implications. Assessment models need to be broadened to include spiritually sensitive and culturally responsive measures that capture both positive religious engagement and spiritual distress or marginalization experiences. Intervention strategies need to acknowledge spirituality as a source of strength, while simultaneously targeting spiritual conflict, religious trauma, or oppression as legitimate sites of psychosocial concern. Above all, social workers are summoned to practice cultural humility, respecting clients' various spiritual and religious stories without passing judgment about their values. Ethical and strengths-based practice requires that we not pathologize or idealize belief systems, but instead witness with and

accompany individuals within their own meaning-making systems. This is consistent with the profession's care for dignity, self-determination, and human wholeness.

CONCLUSION

This review highlights the complex role of religiosity and spirituality in influencing gambling behaviors and treatment outcomes. While religiosity is frequently found to be a protective construct that grounds individuals in established moral regimes and encourages behavioral restraint it is also very clear that unresolved spiritual conflicts can be powerful risk factors that energize psychological distress and compulsive gambling.

The spiritually guided therapeutic integration of spiritual factors, particularly in the form of interventions like 12-step programs and spiritually adapted cognitive-behavioral therapy, holds promise to increase treatment entry and long-term recovery. At the same time, the religiosity-gambling fallacy paradox underscores the necessity for more sophisticated clinical strategy one that affirmatively addresses spiritual strengths and remedies cognitive distortions based on religious reasoning.

In spite of some methodological constraints among the included papers, the convergence of findings gives rise to an increasing imperative: to view spirituality and religiosity as not peripheral cultural variables, but as core psychosocial dimensions in prevention and treatment of gambling disorders. Future studies ought to aim for more stringent designs, longitudinal evaluations, and culturally responsive models that can translate spiritual wisdom meaningfully into practice.

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Source of funding: None

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