



Limited research evidence exists on the determinants of transitions from high-risk to low-risk substance use and gambling that occur without clinical or psychotherapeutic intervention; however, evidence supports that a key driver of transitions from harmful to low-risk substance use or gambling is life changes in the user, for example getting a job, getting married and having children.

determinants
reduction
life changes
harmful behaviours

Identifying the factors that influence transitions from harmful to low-risk substance use and gambling - that is, material reductions in harm of a social, mental or physical nature for the user, their friends and family, and wider society - is important for reducing the societal burden of harm from problem behaviours. Analysis was limited to transitions without formal treatment and intervention (often named as “self-change”, “spontaneous remission” or “natural recovery”), as such transitions are clearly understudied, even though this is the most frequent form of full or partial remission. Reductions in harmful substance use and gambling were defined as a reduction in or cessation of an individual’s use, but also changes in societal perceptions and attitudes and changes in the governance of substance use and gambling, both of which can lead to reduced harm.

In contrast to determinants of the transition to risky and harmful substance use and gambling, there is less evidence on factors that influence the transition to low-risk or abstinence behaviour. Evidence suggests that many people change their problem behaviour without formal interventions, but the underlying processes are not well understood, in part because examining changes in behaviour that occur outside of formal settings are difficult to capture.

Key factors that are evidenced to be associated with reductions in harmful behaviour can be grouped into following domains:

- Social, economic, and political environment level: social identity and social networks, economic and cultural changes, social movements, market regulation and formal social control, and criminalization and depenalisation
- Individual level: emotional and cognitive factors, life circumstances and patterns of use and drug knowledge.
- Cellular and molecular level: changes in neurocircuitry and neurotransmitters.

The influence of the social, economic, and political environment in the reduction of harmful substance use and harmful gambling is better understood than that of individual characteristics and cellular and molecular factors.

READ MORE

McLeod J, Gell L, et al. (2014) *Determinants of a reduction in harmful substance use and gambling: an interdisciplinary report*. Addiction and Lifestyles in Contemporary Europe: Reframing Addictions Project (ALICE RAP): [Deliverable D9.1](#)

Gell, L. Bühringer, G. McLeod, J. Forberger, S. Holmes, J. Lingford-Hughes, A. and Meier, P. S. (Eds.) (2016) [‘What determines harm from addictive substance and behaviours?’](#) Oxford: Oxford University Press.