
PRESS RELEASE

NEW RESEARCH SHOWS HALF OF GAMBLERS SAY THEY GAMBLED THE SAME AMOUNT DURING INITIAL MONTHS OF LOCKDOWN, WHILE ONE IN FIVE “PROBLEM GAMBLERS” STATE THEY GAMBLED MORE

- New research commissioned by GambleAware and undertaken by YouGov in May 2020 reveals that approximately half (52%) of gamblers say they gambled about the same amount as they would normally during early lockdown from March to May.
- Meanwhile one in five (20%) problem gamblers (defined as those with a Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI) score of 8+) reported that they gambled more during the initial months of lockdown. Approximately half (52%) of those saying they gambled more cited ‘relieving boredom or for something to do’ as a reason for doing so.
- The research showed an overall reduction of 10 percentage points in gambling participation between October 2019 and May 2020. The exception to this trend is online casino games which saw an increase from 1.5% to 2.3% during the same time period.
- The report revealed a number of barriers to accessing treatment, including lack of awareness of support available and the stigma attached to gambling disorder. GambleAware is working to increase awareness of the treatment and support available for those with gambling disorder and continues to develop referral routes into the National Gambling Treatment Service.

London, 20 October: GambleAware has today published new research undertaken by YouGov which explores the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and first few months of lockdown up until May on gambling behaviour and gambling harm across Great Britain. The study is part of GambleAware’s ongoing *Treatment Needs and Gap Analysis* work to better understand the demand, need and awareness of help and support.

The research found that approximately half (52%) of gamblers say they gambled about the same amount during early lockdown from March to May as they would normally, whilst two-fifths (41%) had gambled less, with 4% reporting that they gambled more.

Those with higher PGSI scores were more likely to have increased gambling than those with lower scores, with one in five (20%) problem gamblers¹ reporting having gambled more during this period. Of those who gambled more in these first few months of lockdown, approximately half (52%) stated ‘relieving boredom or for something to do’ as the reason for doing so, while among gamblers who said they gambled less, ‘not having a desire to gamble’ was the most common reason cited (30%).

¹ Those with PGSI +8 scores

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The research showed that overall gambling rates declined by 10 percentage points between October 2019 and May 2020, with around two-fifths (39%) of respondents participating in any gambling activity during the last four weeks in May 2020, compared with almost half (49%) in October 2019. The only exception to this trend was online casino games, which saw an increase from 1.5% to 2.3% during the same period.

The research also found that overall, 5% of gamblers said they had used safer gambling tools during early lockdown, with more than three-fifths (63%) of problem gamblers (PGSI score 8+) reporting that they had used a safer gambling tool in this period. Meanwhile the reported usage of treatment, advice and support in the last 12 months to help manage their gambling remained largely unchanged with 16% reporting usage in May 2020 compared to 17% October 2019. This includes speaking to a GP, accessing mental health services and speaking to family and friends, amongst other forms.

When examining gambling behaviours and use of gambling tools amongst different demographics, the researchers identified:

- Among both male and female gamblers, the proportion reporting gambling at least once a week had decreased from 53% to 41% for men and from 36% to 31% for women. The bigger decrease among male gamblers is likely due to the type of gambling they participate in, with men more likely to bet on events such as sports, which were cancelled.
- People from BAME communities experiencing any gambling harm (a PGSI score of 1+) were more likely to have used safer gambling tools during initial lockdown in March to May, with one in three citing usage (34%) compared to approximately one in five (19%) of their white counterparts. Those from BAME communities who have a PGSI score of 8+ (problem gamblers) were also more likely to have used books, leaflets, or other printed materials during this time, with 5% reporting using these materials in October compared with 20% in May 2020.
- Younger gamblers (aged 18-34), who tend to have higher PGSI scores on average, were more likely than older age groups to say that they gambled more during lockdown (7% vs 2% of those aged 55+). Younger gamblers aged 18-34 were also more likely (11%) than those aged and 55+ (1%) to say they used safer gambling tools during lockdown.

The qualitative research in the report revealed several barriers to seeking treatment, including a lack of awareness of online professional support available for gambling harms, the stigma attached to problem gambling, a reduction in number of appointments available with a mental health professional due to COVID-19, and no face-to-face options during lockdown.

Sian Griffiths, Deputy Chair of GambleAware, said: *“The findings published today show there is a concerning lack of awareness and use of the gambling treatment and services which exist to provide support and care. While gambling rates seem not to have increased during lockdown, it is alarming that gambling participation amongst those who are gambling are increasing amongst the most vulnerable groups.*

“With more restrictive measures being put into place across the country to control the Covid-19 pandemic, it is absolutely essential that the Government, National Health Services, and charities across Great Britain continue to work together in partnership to promote and improve awareness of the online and telephone services available for gambling treatment, such as the National Gambling Treatment Service and the National Gambling Helpline on 0808 8020 133.”

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Case study 1: Male, 64, PGSI score: 22-26

- He associated gambling with suicide. Since getting cancer and being stuck at home he's spent over £200,000 on gambling websites; the debt has made him contemplate suicide. He said: *"I was very low, very down, very vulnerable. I lost probably £200,000 over a period of 4 years. I wanted to stop, I maxed out my credit cards. The debt agencies were ringing, and I actually thought about suicide at that time."*
- He initially started gambling after being diagnosed with cancer and receiving a large sum of money from work. Loneliness, boredom, excitement and ease all played a role in the increase in his gambling behaviours. He said: *"I think a lot of people have turned to online and online is lethal. The bookies close at midnight so you have to come away, but online you can gamble 24/7"*
- Lockdown made him start gambling again after stopping for five years. Boredom, TV ads and excitement triggered his relapse. He feels a loss of control over his gambling and he is angry at himself for falling prey to it again. He said: *"I've never known as much advertising for gambling, I think they've amplified it because of the lockdown. I've joined up to four sites now. It's getting out of hand again."*
- He doesn't feel comfortable disclosing his gambling addiction to his son or friends because of the stigma associated with it. He's been considering reaching out to GAMSTOP and he's been discussing his issues with his oncology psychologist. He said: *"I think what I might have to do is try GAMSTOP. You can exclude yourself from all gambling, so even if you try to sign up to a site it won't let you. I think there's a stigma attached to gambling disorder because people don't want to admit it, like any addiction. I think people don't want to confront it."*

Case study 2: Female, 34, PGSI score: 5-9

- She has been gambling moderately, both online and through shops: National Lottery, Bet365, online bingo. She associates gambling with secrecy. She said: *"I just associate it with addiction, something people don't really talk about. My parents used to do it once a week and I did it online for them, I thought it would be easier than going to the shop. It was fun to start with, but it's become more stressful."*
- She started gambling because she was physically unwell, had long periods of rest and would feel too fatigued to do anything else. She said: *"I think it's a slight coping thing, as you think you might wake up the next day in a better situation. I'm doing it more because you feel a loss of control on other things in the world, it's something to do which might change your world"*
- Since Covid-19 she's been gambling more because there are less distractions and her mental health has worsened since the lockdown. She feels a loss of control around her gambling behaviours. She said: *"I've been feeling a lot more detached. Feeling slightly numb that nothing matters anyway, so taking more risk in that sense. I just don't have as much of a life to distract me, there's less possibilities in the world for money and you risk a small amount hoping that you'll have more of an income later on."*
- She has never sought support for gambling as it only became a problem in the recent months. She would rather seek support on the phone or on a website, than via GP/friends/family

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because of the shame associated with gambling. She said: *“I’ve only felt like it’s a problem fairly recently and I guess it’s just the shame. I would want to do it anonymously.”*

-ENDS-

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About the Treatment Needs and Gap Analysis study

- The Treatment Needs and Gap Analysis study included a number of separate workstrands. The report published today builds on that work by outlining the key findings of a study to explore the potential impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and early lockdown from March to May on gambling behaviour and gambling harm. The report can be found [here](#).
- The first wave of the study was conducted in two phases in October 2019, and explored usage of and demand for treatment, advice or support, among gamblers and affected others. In Phase 1, YouGov surveyed a nationally representative sample of 12,161 adults in Great Britain. Results were weighted to be representative of the GB adult population according to age, gender, region, socio-economic group and ethnic group. Phase 2 comprised a survey of 3,001 gamblers and affected others. This was weighted to match the group of PGSI 1+ gamblers and affected others found in the nationally representative Phase 1 survey, according to demographics, gambler/affected other status and PGSI score category.
- In May 2020, the same respondents were re-contacted with the aim of exploring changes to gambling behaviour over time, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown. Whilst some of the changes in gambling behaviour are directly related to lockdown, other external factors could have also influenced behaviour, meaning that not all changes can be attributed to lockdown specifically. Each of the surveys were carried out online.

About GambleAware

- GambleAware is an independent charity (Charity No. England & Wales 1093910, Scotland SC049433) that champions a public health approach to preventing gambling harms – see <http://about.gambleaware.org/>
- GambleAware is a commissioner of integrated prevention, education and treatment services on a national scale, with over £40 million of grant funding under active management. In partnership with gambling treatment providers, GambleAware has spent several years methodically building structures for commissioning a coherent system of brief intervention and treatment services, with clearly defined care pathways and established referral routes to and from the NHS – a National Gambling Treatment Service.
- The National Gambling Treatment Service brings together a National Gambling Helpline and a network of locally-based providers across Great Britain that works with partner agencies and people with lived experience to design and deliver a system, which meets the needs of individuals. This system delivers a range of treatment services, including brief intervention,

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counselling (delivered either face-to-face or online), residential programmes and psychiatrist-led care.

- In the 12 months to 31 March 2019, provisional figures show that the National Gambling Treatment Service treated 10,000 people and this is projected to rise to 24,000 people a year by 2021. Helpline activity is currently running at about 30,000 calls and on-line chats per annum. GambleAware also runs the website BeGambleAware.org which helps 6.2 million visitors a year and signposts to a wide range of support services.
- GambleAware produces public health campaigns including Bet Regret. A Safer Gambling Board, including representatives from Public Health England, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, and GambleAware, is responsible for the design and delivery of a campaign based on best practice in public health education. The Bet Regret campaign is being funded through specific, additional donations to the charity, in line with a commitment given to the government by the broadcasting, advertising and gambling industries. See <https://about.gambleaware.org/prevention/safer-gambling-campaign/>.