

Study shows online gambling soared during lockdown, especially among regular gamblers

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Regular gamblers were more than six times more likely to gamble online compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic, according to new research.

The study, led by the University of Bristol and published today (17 May) in the *Journal of Gambling Studies*, showed regular male gamblers were particularly prone to [gambling](#) more often online during the public [lockdown](#) in the UK, compared to their previously reported gambling habits.

Although overall men and women gambled less frequently during lockdown, partly due to betting shops being closed, some forms of gambling increased. For instance, usage of online gambling, including poker, bingo, and casino games, grew six-fold among regular gamblers. Respondents who gambled occasionally were still found to be more than twice as likely than before to gamble online. Those who struggled financially before the pandemic were more likely to report gambling during lockdown.

Lead author Professor Alan Emond, of the University of Bristol's Medical School, said: "This study provides unique real time insights into how people's attitudes and gambling behaviour changed during lockdown, when everyone was stuck inside and unable to participate in most social activities. The findings reveal that although many forms of gambling were restricted, a minority of regular gamblers significantly increased their gambling and betting online. As with so many repercussions of the pandemic, inequalities have been exacerbated and particularly vulnerable groups were worse affected."

The comparative research used two online questionnaires during the first lockdown in 2020, which surveyed the same group of adults, aged 28 years on average, who had previously been asked similar questions about gambling before the pandemic as part of the renowned Children of the 90s study, also known as the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children (ALSPAC).

More than 2,600 adults responded and results revealed that during

lockdown men were three times more likely than women to gamble regularly, defined as more than once a week. Drinking heavily, defined as more than six units in a session (equivalent to more than three pints of beer) at least once a week, was strongly linked to regular gambling among men and women. These trends are likely to be much greater in reality, as the majority (70 per cent) of respondents to the surveys in lockdown were women.

Professor Emond, a public health expert, said: "The strong link between binge drinking and regular gambling is of particular concern, as they are both addictive behaviours which can have serious health and social consequences. With the wider availability of gambling through different online channels, vulnerable groups could get caught in a destructive cycle. A public health approach is needed to minimise gambling harms."

The research builds on other evidence, including the YouGov Covid-19 tracker study, which found that regular gamblers turned to new online options during lockdown. Data from the Gambling Commission derived from the biggest gambling operators in the UK also showed increased revenues during lockdown for online gambling, especially on esports, which dramatically gained in popularity as live sporting events traditionally betted on were suspended. Previous research in the *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, led by the University of Bristol, has revealed children are engaging particularly with esports gambling advertising on social media.

Online advertising expert and co-author Agnes Nairn, Professor of Marketing at the University of Bristol's School of Management, said: "The results of this study and trends being reported more widely are quite alarming. As gambling habits shift online, [vulnerable groups](#) including children and adults who drink heavily may be more easily sucked into these channels. The increased prevalence of home working is also an important consideration for future policy making, as the

temptation to gamble online, amplified by clever advertising, is always there. Children are also falling prey to this advertising, especially for esports, on social media and could get locked into addictive habits from an early age. Stricter regulation is needed in this growing field to protect unwitting consumers."

Alison Clare, Research, Information and Knowledge Director at GambleAware, said: "We know that gambling is part of the daily lives of children, young people and vulnerable adults and this research sheds further light on the impact Covid-19 and lockdown has had on gambling habits for young people. GambleAware is committed to ensuring all those affected by gambling harm have access to the necessary information and advice. All organisations, including National Health Services and charities need to work together to reduce stigma and raise awareness of the help and support that is available via the National Gambling Treatment Service."

Provided by University of Bristol

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