

Millions affected by problem gambling have limited access to support, finds report

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New research has shown a lack of support available for family members and friends of people with gambling problems.

The report recommends the introduction of specific support services for the millions of people in Britain affected by someone else's [gambling](#). The report, by a team at the University of Bristol supported by the abrdn Financial Fairness Trust, comes ahead of the expected publication of the government's White Paper on gambling reforms.

It is estimated that 11.8 million people in Britain may be negatively affected by someone who gambles. Family members and friends are often the unseen casualties of harmful gambling, experiencing a range of harms caused by someone else's gambling. The risk of harm is likely to be much higher for the estimated 3.6 million people who live with a 'problem gambler'.

However, a key concern highlighted by the research was that although [support services](#) exist in Britain, provision is patchy, only serving certain geographical areas or groups, meaning access is limited despite high needs.

The research included in-depth interviews with 45 people who had gambling problems or were affected by gambling. They highlighted a range of problems created by gambling including [family conflict](#), relationship breakdown, [financial losses](#), debt, and significant emotional impact. Speaking to someone from outside the family, such as a counselor, was identified by research participants as a good way to access [emotional support](#).

A workshop participant said, "Some counseling for the next generation like children in the family because sometimes what happens if they see their elders in the family doing it they might go into that cycle by themselves."

As well as professional support, the concept of peer support was very popular.

Researchers identified three main areas where family members and friends who are affected by someone else's gambling would value help and support:

- Understanding what's going on
- How to talk about what's going on
- Accessing specialist support and advice.

In 2021/22, just 971 of the 7,072 clients who used Britain's National Gambling Treatment Service (NGTS) were affected others—equating to 14% of clients. Similarly, in a 2021 [online survey](#) of 18,038 GB adults, 70% of affected others said they had not sought advice or support on behalf of the person with the gambling problem, and they were even less likely to have done so for themselves (78% have not done so).

The report calls for a major investment in services for those affected by someone else's gambling, including:

- The inclusion of specific services for affected others in strategic commissioning plans e.g. the NHS Long Term Plan and the National Gambling Treatment Service as well as increased funding for other types of provision.
- Regularly-run publicity and awareness-raising public health campaigns about the impact of gambling problems on family members and friends.
- Clear, targeted messaging about the existing services that can provide the types of help and support [family members](#) and friends want.
- Making sure there is 'no wrong door' for people who seek help, whether they are someone who gambles or an affected other, including a simple way to find information online about the range of help available.

Professor Sharon Collard, Chair in Personal Finance and Co-Director of the Bristol Hub for Gambling Harms Research at the University of Bristol, said, "Our research highlights that harm from gambling extends well beyond the individuals who experience gambling problems themselves, to their family and social circles."

"Personal relationship harms, financial harms and emotional harms from gambling problems compound each other in damaging ways within family and friendship networks; and can span several decades or generations. Existing and planned services must recognize and respond to this wide range of needs more effectively in order to reduce and prevent harm from gambling."

Mubin Haq, CEO of abrdn Financial Fairness Trust, said, "The challenges experienced by friends and families of problem gamblers are often ignored and services which offer support are thin on the ground and underfunded. This research shines a light on what people who have experienced the issue say they need. The new gambling White Paper is an opportunity to increase investment to ensure we have the essential support many people affected by problem gambling need."

Provided by University of Bristol

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