

UNDERSTANDING GAMBLING AND GAMBLING HARMS IN LGBTQ+ COMMUNITIES

PHASE 2 – FINDINGS FROM AN ONLINE COMMUNITY AND IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

WHAT IS ALREADY KNOWN?

As a recreational activity, gambling can be undertaken without any negative effects, but some people are harmed by gambling. There is limited research focusing on the lived experience of gambling in LGBTQ+ communities.

WHAT DID WE WANT TO FIND OUT?

The aim of this study was to provide an in-depth insight into the lived experience of gambling and gambling harms in LGBTQ+ communities, specifically looking at:

- 1 how gambling affects LGBTQ+ people and the challenges they face because of it;
- 2 the impacts of gambling harms;
- 3 the factors that can either protect or put LGBTQ+ people at risk when it comes to gambling;
- 4 how LGBTQ+ people find help or support to deal with gambling harms.



University of Brighton

GambLGBTQ+

switchboard

connecting you to LGBTQ+ support

GambleAware

Advice | Tools | Support

WHAT DID WE DO?



This phase, conducted by YouGov, involved follow-up conversations with some of the survey participants, allowing us to hear directly from them in their own words. Here we:

1

ran an online community via a digital platform where 53 LGBTQ+ people shared their experiences of gambling through journaling tasks and reflective tasks.

2

carried out in-depth interviews with 15 LGBTQ+ adults across Great Britain.

WHAT DID WE FIND?



MODES OF GAMBLING

Online gambling was most popular when compared to gambling in person. Participants said that they preferred it for privacy and ease, especially those worried about being judged in public places.

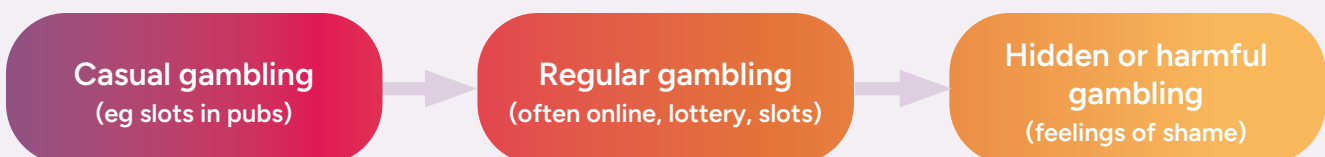
I think when you're online you get your own privacy, you get the freedom to do what you want without eyes on you.

34, Trans woman, Bisexual,
A person who gambles, PGSI* – 7



PROGRESSION OF GAMBLING

Participants often started with low-risk or casual forms of in-person gambling, like playing slot machines in pubs. Some then moved on to more regular gambling, often online, like buying lottery tickets or playing online slots. Gambling was initially seen as a 'fun', social activity but later became something they hid due to shame. Gambling is seen as more accessible now than ever before, due to technological advancements.



DRIVERS OF GAMBLING

Motivations for gambling included the chance of making money, with "winning big" a clear driver for gambling, whereas others saw gambling as a "coping mechanism" or a form of "escapism."

My coping mechanism was to gamble to switch off, you know, from the worry, the thoughts, the loneliness, the feeling empty.

30, Male, Gay, A person who gambles, PGSI – 3

make
money

change lifestyle

create excitement

escape boredom

*PGSI is the Problem Gambling Severity Index to assess the risk of problem gambling ranging from 0 "no risk" to 8+ "high risk"

WHAT DID WE FIND?



EXPERIENCES OF GAMBLING HARMS

For some, issues with gambling can arise because of being both LGBTQ+ and having a mental or physical disability or being neurodivergent, which can increase an individual's likelihood and/or motivations to gamble.

I'm LGBT, disabled and a stay-at-home parent. Being disabled and a new parent means I struggle with money already and struggle with loneliness. The LGBT identity can make me feel more alone and gambling is a way to speak to others and fill time in the day.

24, Non-binary, Queer, A person who gambles + affected other, PGSI – 24

I think my mental health issues and neurodiversity push me towards gambling as well as being LGBT. I like the dopamine buzz of checking a ticket, and it kind of feeds the ADHD bit of my brain.

26, Female, Bisexual, A person who gambles + affected other, PGSI – 2



AFFECTED OTHERS

People affected by someone else's gambling – especially immediate family or partners – described a range of emotional, financial, and health impacts that can have long-lasting effects on their daily lives and relationships, including financial loss and the risk of homelessness.

My mother would complain about it openly when he would spend the mortgage money or food shopping money on gambling. She would have to scramble to get it from somewhere, someone else... It made us all very stressed about our financial security and that we might lose our home.

43, Male, Gay, A person who gambles + affected other, PGSI – 4



RISK FACTORS FOR GAMBLING HARMS

Most LGBTQ+ people felt that their LGBTQ+ identity did not impact their gambling habits, with some reporting that other factors like substance use or mental health felt more significant. For some LGBTQ+ people, using drugs and alcohol fulfilled a similar function to gambling – for escapism and to numb painful feelings.

ALCOHOL AND DRUGS

LGBTQ+ people who reported using substances like alcohol and drugs at high levels said that using these substances has impacted their gambling to some degree by increasing their feelings of confidence and by reducing their inhibitions. This made them prone to gamble for longer periods and to take more risks.

Drinking sometimes causes silly decisions, so once I was in a casino after lots of cocktails and gambled more than I would have sober. Alcohol sometimes makes me take risks that I wouldn't usually.

24, Female, Lesbian, A person who gambles + affected other, PGSI – 2, Online community

WHAT DID WE FIND?

DISCRIMINATION, SOCIAL ISOLATION, AND VICTIMISATION

For LGBTQ+ people who reported experiences of discrimination, isolation or victimisation during negative life events, gambling served as a form of escapism.

I was attacked on a night out after a group approached me for directions [...] before I knew it four men attacked me [...] it was the worst night of my life. Truthfully, I turned more to gambling, locking myself away at home without criticism or judgement. I have overcome this now but still see so much hate for the queer community.

30, Male, Gay, A person who gambles, PGSI – 3, Online community

LGBTQ+ people who were victimised reported that they may have had to alter or hide parts of themselves to avoid adversity. Where LGBTQ+ people were less connected to social support, they were more likely to experience greater gambling harms.



BARRIERS TO STOPPING GAMBLING

Where LGBTQ+ people wanted to stop gambling, the key barriers to stopping or reducing were a lack of awareness about the support types available, uncertainty about whether support would be effective, alongside continuous exposure to gambling advertising.

TRAUMA AND MENTAL HEALTH

Many LGBTQ+ people mentioned how difficult emotions caused by traumatic experiences, some of them based on being LGBTQ+, affected their mental health.

I have historic mental ill-health from my childhood... having to grow up too soon, taking on the role of the parent for my six siblings, even though I was third youngest. A gambling father and alcoholic mother with suicidal ideation and the triple whammy of being gay all added to this.

60, Male, Gay, A person who gambles, PGSI – 3, Online community

In terms of mental health, the ability of LGBTQ+ people to overcome a period of poor mental health was partly linked to improvements in other areas of their lives, such as their financial situation, education status, employment, housing status, and access to a support network.



Stigma / shame



Ad saturation



Lack of LGBTQ+ specific services



Financial independence / debt



24/7 online access



Fear of being outed



Mistrust of mainstream services



Social isolation

Consistent adverts going to my emails. Promotions and free spins or discount codes. Also, notifications on my phone.

36, Male, Gay, A person who gambles + affected other, PGSI – 14, Online community

WHAT DID WE FIND?



PROTECTIVE FACTORS AGAINST GAMBLING HARMS



Self-exclusion tools



Bank blocks



LGBTQ+ inclusive therapy/services



Peer support groups



Supportive friends / family



Education and awareness



Limits on time and spending



Access to specialist services

SELF-EXCLUSION

LGBTQ+ people were asked what helped them stop or reduce their gambling. Many found affordability checks, self-exclusion, and limits through their bank effective to ensure that people do not gamble more than they can afford.

When I was gambling, contacting my bank and reaching out for support was probably the best move. Just blocking the card from any gambling transactions stopped me from further damaging my finances.

34, Female, Bisexual, A person who gambles + affected other, PGSI – 7

REGULATION AND ADVERTISING

People wanted better gambling regulation and less gambling advertising, with more prominent messages about potential gambling harms, alongside better age verification.

Gambling advertising should be banned, as it only promotes an ongoing and potentially life-threatening habit, just as bad as smoking or alcoholism.

56, Male, Gay, A person who gambles, PGSI – 7

SOCIAL SUPPORT

For some, support from family and friends was also helpful in keeping them distracted and/or preventing them from spending money on gambling. Some also mentioned keeping busy with other activities or hobbies to avoid thinking about gambling. A few also benefitted from a journey of education – through developing their awareness of gambling harms, they could reflect on their own gambling.

ACCESSING SUPPORT TO TACKLE GAMBLING HARMS

Some LGBTQ+ people had concerns about discrimination when accessing support and uncertainty about whether they would be eligible for support when gambling at lower levels.

I once went to the GP, and I asked him for support, and I felt more judged than anything. I felt as if I had just wasted my time because he kind of just brushed everything off as if I were a bad person.

37, Male, Gay, A person who gambles, PGSI – 3

LGBTQ+ SPECIFIC SUPPORT

Many LGBTQ+ people said having LGBTQ+ specific support would reassure them that they won't be judged for their gambling or their identity.

I would reach out. I think a company solely based on LGBT help would be ideal, and you know they would not be judgmental in the slightest.

34, Female, Bisexual, A person who gambles + affected other, PGSI – 7, Online community

A sense of safety when seeking support was crucial for LGBTQ+ people and often meant being able to access anonymous support or inclusive spaces.

GENERAL SUPPORT

There was also a clear need for holistic services to address other addictions or mental health issues, alongside higher awareness about the support types available.

"I've had mental health support and debt advice. I still feel very anxious and isolated, but I'm paying off the debts. I spoke to my GP and used some of the websites and the helpline. It was a bit of help. The best support has been group therapy with others who have had similar experiences."

51, Female, Bisexual, Affected other, PGSI – 0

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



Public awareness: There is a need to raise public awareness about the potential harms of gambling, along with providing access to support and treatment services for LGBTQ+ people who need them.



Better regulation: Effective regulation is needed to address gambling harms, particularly to curb gambling advertising, and to ensure affordability checks with sufficient verification of information, particularly for those who gamble online.



Treatment and support: Programmes tailored to the unique experiences of LGBTQ+ people are essential. Treatment and support options should be holistic and affirming whilst creating a safe space for LGBTQ+ people. Mental health support should be combined with substance use within gambling treatment frameworks.



Self-exclusion and tech-based tools: LGBTQ+ people should be able to self-exclude from gambling venues or online sites or by contacting their bank to limit or block their ability to gamble.



Policy: Policymakers need to develop and implement evidence-based strategies to prevent and reduce gambling-related harms as a key public health issue.



Inclusive research: There is a need to involve LGBTQ+ people with lived experience of gambling harms in future research.

WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE ABOUT THIS RESEARCH?

The full report can be found on our blog: <https://blogs.brighton.ac.uk/gambling-harms>

You can also visit our blog to find out more about the GambLGBTQ+ project team and other reports and resources.

WHO CARRIED OUT THIS RESEARCH?

The project was a collaboration between the University of Brighton, YouGov, Brighton and Hove LGBT Switchboard, and representatives of LGBTQ+ community including those with lived experience of gambling harms. The project was funded by GambleAware.

SUPPORT IS AVAILABLE

GamCare – Provides National Gambling Helpline and a WhatsApp chat (Free 24-7) with an adviser on **0808 8020 133** or online live chat.