

# UNDERSTANDING GAMBLING AND GAMBLING HARMS IN LGBTQ+ COMMUNITIES

## PHASE 3 – FINDINGS FROM A PHOTOVOICE STUDY

### WHAT IS ALREADY KNOWN?

Gambling can lead to serious harm for some people, and potentially more for minority groups. LGBTQ+ people face additional health challenges due to stigma and discrimination. There is limited research on gambling harms in LGBTQ+ communities, which makes it difficult to tailor support services and prevention strategies.

### WHAT DID WE WANT TO FIND OUT?

We wanted to understand the lived experiences of gambling and gambling harm for LGBTQ+ people:

1. We explored what LGBTQ+ people thought was important about gambling harms and the wider social circumstances that shaped their experiences;
2. We asked people what kind of support is needed and what they would like to see done differently in the future.



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Advice | Tools | Support

## WHAT DID WE DO?



1

We conducted 1-2-1 photovoice interviews with nine participants across the South and East of England, five were people who had gambled and four were affected by someone else's gambling.

2

We asked LGBTQ+ participants to take photos to reflect their experiences of gambling and discussed these images during the interviews.

3

We held a photo exhibition and an impact event to present the photographs.

## WHAT DID WE FIND?



There were three dimensions to the photovoice interview data: 1) participants' lived experiences of gambling harms; 2) participants' reflections on the photovoice process; and 3) actions for change.

### 1) FOUR KEY THEMES WERE CREATED IN THE ANALYSIS PROCESS:

**The first theme was intersectional vulnerabilities.** There were multiple reasons, causes, and life circumstances that increased participants' vulnerability to gambling harm. These overlapped to form specific experiences of gambling harm, stigma and recovery. Two participants experienced gambling as "a way to escape" emotional distress, social isolation, and environments where anti-LGBTQ+ sentiment was present (see Image 1).



Growing up in a traditional, religious environment, I learned to see being gay as something shameful. Having grown up attending an extremely homophobic church (the kind staging anti-gay protests), I was convinced that my feelings were wrong and morally reprehensible, and I couldn't see myself ever being happy or living an upright, respectable life. Having tried so hard to suppress my identity and feelings, gambling became a way to cope – a way to escape who I was.

N (20s, white, gay man, person who has gambled)

The role of secrecy, shame, and stigma around sexuality and gambling harm came to the fore with photovoice presenting an opportunity to counter this. For example, one participant wrote short letters to his father drawing on his own experience of secrecy and hiding (see Image 2). Some participants spoke of the need for existing support to be LGBTQ+ friendly. Recovery support should take a holistic approach, addressing intersecting factors such as trauma, domestic abuse, sexuality, and neurodivergence.

# WHAT DID WE FIND?



Dad, the secrets that kept you behind this closed door. The shame that kept you behind this closed door. I can understand something about how that feels. At the time I lived with you when you were behind your closed door, I was behind mine too. Yours a garage, mine a bedroom, both a closet. You don't know that I know about the credit cards and the debts, so all the talking I do to you now is in my head where I have built a compassion for your struggle and where I have joined up the dots that I know about, within the hiding.

Eli (40s, white, queer trans masculine, affected other)

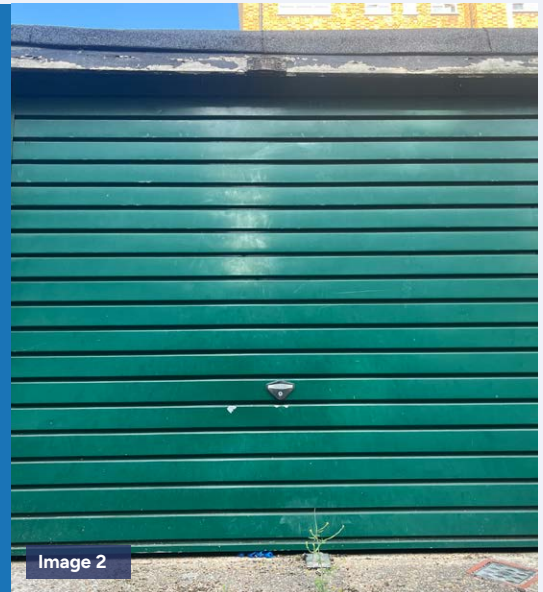


Image 2

Neurodivergence was an important intersectional vulnerability, with those who had accessed formal support for gambling harms highlighting that tailored support for their neurodivergence, such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), was key to sustaining their recovery. For example, Sabrina stated:

**“[being] neurodivergent and LGBT... I didn't feel they offered me the right treatment for that. And that's not saying they weren't good. They had many things that I benefited from and learnt. But to really kick gambling and to understand how it all intertwined. I needed a lot more [...] until I really understood about the ADHD and autism I was nowhere. I really didn't get anywhere with recovery.”**

Sabrina (50s, white, woman, person who has gambled, and experiences of homelessness due to the impacts of gambling).

Another participant, George (see Image 3), reflected on how their beliefs and mental health intersected with their neurodivergence and economic status.



Image 3



“The photos for me represent magical thinking and they contain different angel numbers. They are repeated numbers like in, like a string like 222, 444, 777. There is like a superstition around angel numbers that they are signs of good luck, signs that you're on the right path. [...]. I've always been quite afraid of gambling because I really recognise that I'm poor, I have ADHD. I'm highly prone to magical thinking.”

George (20s, Black mixed-race, trans and non-binary queer, affected other, and experience of homelessness).

A final intersectional vulnerability was migration and how moving between countries had meant a lack of social support. For example, Leyla became close friends with a person who gambled while in the USA and found she needed to step back from trying to help them for her own welfare (see Image 4).

# WHAT DID WE FIND?



"I just remember having a conversation and realising how deep they were in that addiction – and how trying to follow them will steal me away, and in the US I didn't have any family or any support system and [...] you realise it is only going to get deeper and more dangerous, so I have to pull back to take care of myself"

Leyla (30s, Asian Crimean Tatar, queer woman, asylum-seeker, affected other)

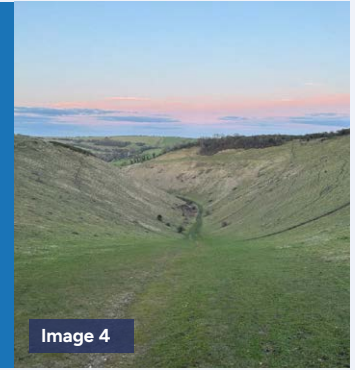


Image 4

The **second theme** was how participants were concerned over the **normalisation, availability, and accessibility of gambling**. For example, Kate was aware of the influence that advertising and the online environment could have on her daughters, and took steps to limit their exposure (see Image 5).



Image 5



"it's how easy and accessible it is, and how easily they push it at you. I've got two daughters. [...] if you go on the internet, they push, if you watch TV and there's adverts, they're pushing gambling on the adverts, and I suppose you always think you're going to win. It's very easy to get sucked in. [...] I've purposely not given my daughters smartphones and that's very unusual compared to other parents. But I know that there's all those things that are going to try and hook her into things through social media."

Kate (60s, white, queer lesbian woman, person who has gambled)

The **third theme** highlighted the **wide-ranging nature of gambling harm that occurred across generations**, which included not only financial loss, but also the loss of time and connection. For example, in Images 6 and 7, two participants, David and Juno, expressed a loss of time and potential connection.



"It also gives me a feeling of waiting for my dad to come home after gambling, thinking that he'd be back in like an hour or two. And then it'll be ages, and I'd just be waiting for him to come home."

Juno (20s, white, agender lesbian, affected other, and experiences of homelessness).

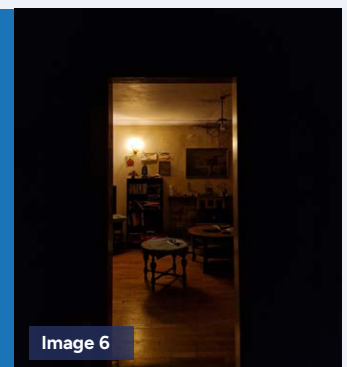
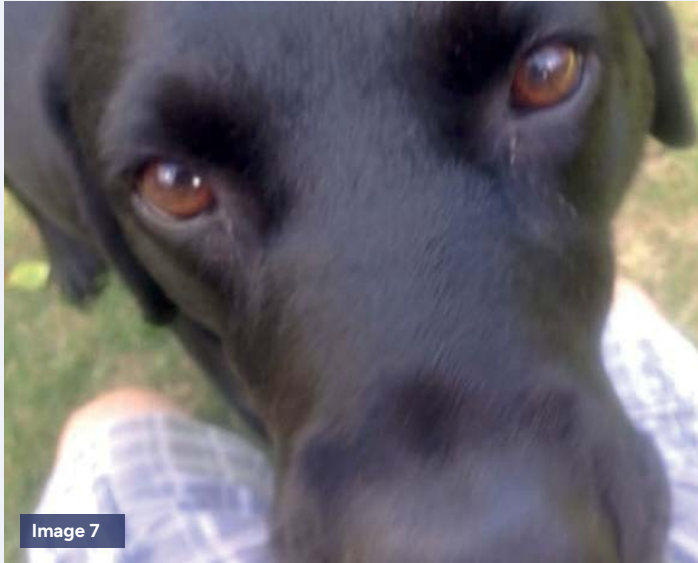


Image 6



# WHAT DID WE FIND?



"I'm sorry that there wasn't extra time for you, Dad. And I'm sorry there wasn't a more luxurious toy for you, Charlie. [...] My photos, part of this study, will show you that there was love and will show you that the basics were covered in life for that love. But don't forget the message that either one of them lost a bit of luxury at a certain time."

David (40s, white, gay man, person who has gambled)

The fourth theme was the **benefits and 'constant maintenance' of recovery**. Recovery journeys were not linear and needed what David called 'a constant maintenance'. This involved drawing on resources and knowledge when faced with changing circumstances. For some participants, recovery meant creating meaningful relationships with those around them and their environment (see Image 8).



"Connecting with real friendship, connecting with friends on a really deep level because you're not obsessed with trying to raise funds for your addiction. Instead focused on nature and friendship and love and life."

Sabrina (50s, white, woman, person who has gambled, and experiences of homelessness due to the impacts of gambling).



## 2) PARTICIPANTS' REFLECTIONS ON THE PHOTOVOICE PROCESS.

Many participants expressed that the photovoice process allowed them to reflect and convey what was important for them, often in ways that words alone could not capture, with the photos having a personal symbolic importance. Photovoice meant participants could speak about their experiences, particularly in recognition of the "unsaidness" that often surrounds gambling harms within LGBTQ+ communities and spaces.

## 3) 'ACTIONS FOR CHANGE'

The Actions for Change were drawn from participants' suggestions and the researchers' analysis. The Actions for Change recognise the interconnected and multi-faceted nature of gambling harm where systems change is needed with suggested actions for gambling-specific support and treatment, the regulation of gambling, education, and wider health support.

# WHAT ARE THE KEY FINDINGS AND NEXT STEPS?



The research findings show the importance of developing specific support systems appropriate for each person harmed by gambling. There is a need to address the detrimental societal conditions that normalise and perpetuate gambling, and anti-LGBTQ+ sentiment.



The findings suggest a need for an LGBTQ+ inclusive preventative and intersectional public health approach to gambling and gambling harm.



The photovoice process as a form of human-centred storytelling creates the opportunity for reflection and sharing amongst those with lived experience which raises awareness and builds empathy on gambling harm and LGBTQ+ people as an underrepresented issue.



Further research should include those with lived experience to explore intergenerational gambling harms, as well as neurodivergence and gambling harm, and to understand the commercial determinants of gambling harm.

## 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.