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## Statistics and research release

# Exploring the impact of Covid-19 on gambling behaviour

Research commissioned to explore the impact coronavirus has had on gambling behaviours.

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## Summary

This qualitative research was designed to add an additional layer of insight onto our ongoing monitoring of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. We recognise that this is not a nationally representative piece of research but it provides a useful window into the wider experiences of some gambling consumers, to consider alongside our robust data and statistics.

### Key facts

- Whilst the pandemic has spurred reflection on

life and finances, many participants in this research have not changed their online gambling behaviours and only a minority have decreased gambling frequency

- Experimentation with new games and reliance on (debit) card payments can also make it harder to track spending – which has resulted in greater overall spend (though not necessarily higher stakes)
- Many participants report feeling disappointed at their gambling habits since the pandemic, with only a minority noting positive impacts
- Whilst younger participants in the research were more likely to have increased overall time and money spent gambling, they were less worried about this compared to older age groups.

## Details

The Gambling Commission has been collecting data from gambling businesses and consumers throughout the coronavirus pandemic to show how Covid-19 measures and the varying levels of restrictions have impacted online gambling behaviour. We have published [Covid-19 updates \(/statistics-and-research/collection/covid-19-research\)](#) on a monthly basis since March 2020. The aim of this piece of research was to explore the ongoing impact of Covid on gambling participation in Great Britain and add qualitative insights to our ongoing data collection.

In early 2021 we commissioned 2CV to conduct a piece of qualitative research covering a range of topics as part of our ongoing work to bring the voice of the consumer into our thinking. 30 participants who had gambled online in the previous 12 months took part in an online community over a two-week period which focused on two core modules; the use of credit cards and borrowed money to gamble, and the process and experience of

making complaints to gambling operators <sup>1</sup>.

Given the timing of the research we took the opportunity to also ask these respondents about the way that the Covid-19 pandemic had impacted their gambling behaviour. This means that the sample was made up of people who had previously gambled with a credit card, or who had previously made, or wanted to make, a complaint about a gambling operator. There were also a larger proportion of participants who scored at the higher end of the PGSI (moderate-risk or problem gambler). This allowed us to explore the impact of Covid-19 amongst a group that may have been more at risk of experiencing harm.

The community had an even split of male and female participants, and a mix of different ages, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds.

### **About our Consumer Voice research**

We use a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods to gather views, opinions, and insights from gambling consumers. This work complements our nationally representative statistics on gambling participation and the prevalence of problem gambling but goes into more depth on key issues and emerging areas of interest, with focussed samples of consumers. Our Consumer Voice research is currently conducted by 2CV, who use a combination of online surveys and online community panels to tap into the voice of gambling consumers and those affected by gambling in Great Britain.

The following findings summarise the experiences, behaviours and views of the participants of the online community. These findings are qualitative and therefore have not been expressed in numerical figures.

The pandemic has spurred reflection on life and finances. Participants reported having more time to reflect on how they spend their time and what they value in life, to consider how they spend their money, and the impact of gambling on their overall finances.

For a minority of the participants, this reflection has prompted a decrease in gambling activity. This has been driven by two key factors; change in financial situation or fear thereof, and a re-evaluation of the role that gambling plays in people's lives. A reduction in income as a result of furlough, job-loss or job changes has prompted some to re-prioritise what they spend their money on, whilst for others the uncertainty of the pandemic and its predicted economic impact is making them more nervous about spending. For some participants, gambling was seen as a social activity that is less exciting alone, whilst some are experiencing less pressure from friends to gamble.

“I've reduced the amount of time I gamble. I've had to cut back on gambling during Covid because of my reduced income”. - Male, 47, PGSI 3-7

However, many participants had not changed their gambling behaviours. Increased reflection on finances had not translated into behaviour change for many people taking part in the research, as their lives or financial situations hadn't been impacted much. Many have still been travelling to and from work, have similar levels of spare time and the same salary as before the pandemic.

“Covid has not changed how I feel about my gambling as I have been gambling since before covid had started so nothing has really changed for me.” – Female, 23, PGSI 0

In fact, half of all participants in the community told us

that they had increased the time they spent gambling. The main reasons given were the fact that online gambling is accessible anytime, and anywhere, and that they had more time on their hands and reported increased boredom as a result of the pandemic. This pattern was most common among younger players, across all levels of the PGSI.

“I have found out I am gambling more than I would pre-Covid. I find myself bored in the evening so I tend to play a lot of online bingo” – Female, 25, PGSI 3-7

Experimentation with new games and reliance on card payments have made it harder for some to track spending. Participants reported that boredom and newfound time have incentivized them to try new games online, and spend more time playing them than they used to. This can make it harder to keep track of spend, especially when paying via card, which has resulted in greater overall spend for some players. This is a similar finding to [other evidence](#) ([/statistics-and-research/publication/consumer-views-on-cashless-payments-in-land-based-gambling](#)) recently gathered on the topic of payment methods.

“My overall spend has gone up, I spend more money because I play for longer. My stakes haven't increased as that frightens me... it's just a lot of time and therefore a lot of money” – Female, 36, PGSI 1-2

Many participants stated that their gambling behaviour has not changed and that they have always gambled in the same way, however just under half of participants noted that their feelings towards gambling have been negatively impacted by Covid-19.

This has manifested in feelings of disappointment (for

breaking personal promises, not sticking to budgets and chasing losses) and concern (for spending borrowed money and noticing obsessive behaviours), which occurred regardless of PGSI score. Despite this, participants reported that they are aware of the behaviours and still feel as though they are in control.

## Key points for further consideration

2CV provided the following points to note and consider:

Whilst many reported reflecting on overall finances and gambling behaviours in the pandemic; for most, these reflections did not translate into behaviour change. Many also found it easy to justify more time and money spent gambling as a result of lack of other leisure activities.

It will be important to consider:

- The impact on behaviours as things return to 'normal': it is likely many have picked up new gambling routines and habits during lockdown that may be hard to change as things return to normal, even as normal spending on other things resumes. This could have serious consequences for people's finances.
- Younger audiences: It appears that younger audiences are most at risk of spending more time and money on gambling and are also less likely to be concerned about this behaviour. Communications about gambling risks may need to look at targeting this group specifically.

## Notes

<sup>†</sup> Research on the use of credit cards and borrowed money to gamble, and the process and experience of making complaints to gambling operators, will be

published later in 2021.

# Data and downloads

## Files



### Exploring the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic

VND.OPENXMLFORMATS-OFFICEDOCUMENT.PRESENTATIONM L.PRESENTATION 13.8 MB

(//downloads.ctfassets.net/j16ev64qyf6l/1A5eZGfhT6SMRW08b29Xcd/c91f8411f32f9e8fc1cd7f2ba59083a7/Exploring\_Gambling\_\_Finance\_-\_Impact\_of\_Covid\_chapter.pptx)

## Feedback

We are always keen to hear how these statistics are used and would welcome your views on this publication.

[Give us feedback about these statistics](#)

(/forms/stats/exploring-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-gambling-behaviour).