

## Gambling in Britain: Findings from the 2007 British Gambling Prevalence Study

Heather Wardle, Kerry Sproston, Jim Orford, Bob Erens, Mark Griffiths,  
Rebecca Constantine, Sarah Pigott



In 1999, the British Gambling Prevalence Study was conducted by NatCen, providing robust information on the nature and extent of gambling in Britain for the first time. Since then the nature of gambling has changed substantially, with an increasing number of gambling products available (including the expansion of online gambling opportunities) and changes in legislation. NatCen conducted the 2007 Prevalence Study prior to the full implementation of the Gambling Act in September 2007, to provide baseline data on the nature and extent of gambling and attitudes to gambling. A secondary objective was to track changes in behaviour since 1999.

- 68% of the adult population had participated in at least one type of gambling activity in the last year – around 32 million adults.
- 57% of people reported that they had bought tickets for the National Lottery, making this the most popular type of gambling activity.
- Since 1999, participation in gambling has fallen from 72% to 68%. However, if people whose only form of gambling was the National Lottery Draw are excluded, there was a small increase in the proportion of people gambling, rising from 46% in 1999 to 48% in 2007.
- ‘Problem gambling’ is gambling to a degree that compromises, disrupts or damages family, personal or recreational pursuits.
- Around half a percent of the population were identified as problem gamblers, equating to around a quarter of million adults in Britain.
- Problem gambling rates were higher than average amongst some sub-groups of the population: men; those age 16-44; those reporting that a parent was or had been a problem gambler; single people; those in poor health; Asian/Asian British, Black/Black British groups; and those with fewer than average educational qualifications.

# Gambling in Britain: Findings from the 2007 British Gambling Prevalence Study

The main objectives of the 2007 prevalence study were to measure the extent to which people participate in gambling activities, look at how participation varies by different types of activities, and examine the profile of people who gamble.

The study was based on a random sample of just over 9000 adults aged 16 and over living in private households within Great Britain.

Respondents were asked about their participation in a range of different gambling activities in the last year. The types of activities included ranged from more established forms of gambling, such as the National Lottery Draw, bingo, casino table games or betting with a bookmaker to newer forms of gambling including online gambling, Fixed Odd Betting Terminals, spreadbetting and betting exchanges.

**In 2007, 68% of the population, around 32 million adults, had participated in at least one type of gambling activity in the last year.**

The most popular activities were the National Lottery Draw, with 57% of people reporting that they had bought tickets for the National Lottery, followed by scratchcards (20%), betting on horse races (17%) and playing slot machines (14%).

Notably, the most popular pursuits were more established forms of gambling and not newer activities that had emerged since 1999.

- Only a small proportion of people reported gambling on newer forms of activities. 3% of people had used a Fixed Odds Betting Terminal in a bookmakers, 4% had used the internet to place a bet and 3% had gambled online (playing poker or casino games).
- Overall, 6% of the population had used the internet to gamble in some way within the last year.

Although these newer forms of gambling were undertaken by a smaller proportion of people, it is interesting to note that they are already as popular as some more established forms of gambling, such as playing table games in a casino (in which 4% of people participated), dog races (5%) and football pools (3%).

The overall number of people gambling in the last year fell from 72% in 1999 to 68% in 2007. However, this decline can largely be attributed to the falling popularity of the National Lottery Draw (participation in the National Lottery fell from 65% in 1999 to 57% in 2007).

Excluding people whose only form of gambling was the National Lottery Draw, there was a small, but significant, increase in the proportion of people gambling between 1999 and 2007, rising from 46% in 1999 to 48% in 2007.

Our research showed that the likelihood of having gambled in the past year (including the National Lottery) varied by:

- Age: those aged 25–54 were more likely to gamble than other age groups, with around 70% reporting gambling in the last year.
- Gender: men were more likely than women to gamble overall (71% of men and 65% of women gambled in the last year).
- Ethnic group: those who described their ethnic origin as White were more likely to be past year gamblers (70%) than those whose ethnic group was Black or Black British (39%) or Asian or Asian British (45%).
- Level of education: those with higher levels of educational attainment were less likely to gamble. 61% of those educated to degree level had gambled in the last year compared with 73% of those who were educated to GCSE/O-level.
- Household income: people from higher income households were more likely to be past year gamblers, the rate increasing from 61% among lowest income households to 72% for highest income households.

**One of the main aims of our study was to measure the prevalence of 'problem gambling' in Britain, that is gambling to a degree that compromises, disrupts or damages family, personal or recreational pursuits.**

Two different questionnaire screens were used to measure problem gambling in the 2007 study: the DSM-IV and the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI). The DSM-IV focuses on psychological motivations underpinning problem gambling. It was used in the 1999 study and so allows estimates from 2007 and 1999 to be directly compared. The PGSI, developed since the 1999 study, focuses more on the harms and consequences of gambling.

Our study showed that in 2007, 0.6% of the population were problem gamblers according to the DSM-IV, 0.5% according to the PGSI. This equates (according to either measure) to around a quarter of million adults in Britain.

The following information focuses on data from the DSM-IV.

Problem gambling was more prevalent among men (1.0%) than women (0.2%) and among younger age groups, falling from 0.9% of those aged 16–44 to 0.3% of those aged 65–74. Our analysis also showed that there was a significant positive association between problem gambling and:

- reporting that a parent was or had been a problem gambler;
- being single;
- being in poor health;
- being Asian or Asian British or Black or Black British; and
- having fewer educational qualifications.

Problem gamblers participated in a number of different types of gambling activities and, on average, had taken part in six different types of gambling activity within the last year. The highest prevalence of problem gambling was found among those who in the last year had participated in:

- spreadbetting (14.7% of spreadbettors were problem gamblers);
- Fixed Odds Betting Terminals (11.2%);
- betting exchanges (9.8%);
- online gambling (7.4%).

These are notably newer forms of gambling emergent since 1999. Problem gambling prevalence rates among more established forms of gambling ranged from 1.0% of those who had bought tickets for the National Lottery to 5.2% of those who had bet on dog races.

However, there was no change in the overall prevalence of problem gambling between 1999 and 2007. The prevalence of problem gambling, as measured by the DSM-IV, was the same as it had been in 1999 – 0.6% of adults.



A further objective for our study was to assess the attitudes of the general public to gambling. A new 14-item scale was developed specifically for the 2007 survey with the purpose of measuring population attitudes to gambling in general.

Overall, attitudes to gambling tended to be more negative than positive. The general view was that gambling was more harmful than beneficial and that it should not be encouraged. However, an outright prohibition of gambling was rejected and the view that people had a right to gamble was, on the whole, supported.

People with the most favourable attitudes to gambling were:

- those aged 35 and under;
- heavier drinkers;
- those who had taken part in four or more different gambling activities in the last year;
- those who were classified as a problem gambler.

Those people with the least favourable attitudes to gambling were:

# Gambling in Britain: Findings from the 2007 British Gambling Prevalence Study

- those describing themselves as Asian or Asian British;
- non-gamblers;
- those who had a parent or close relative with a gambling problem.

## Discussion

Our results show that although problem gambling prevalence has not increased since 1999, around a quarter of a million people in Britain have problems with their gambling behaviour and this remains a serious public health issue.

Including the National Lottery as a form of gambling activity shows that participation in all types of gambling has slightly decreased between 1999 and 2007 despite the increased availability of gambling products. However, if people whose only form of gambling is the National Lottery Draw are excluded, there has been a small increase in the proportion of people participating in some other form of gambling.

Our results also show how gambling behaviour and attitudes vary between different groups of the British population. Many patterns were the same as those observed in 1999. However, in the 2007 study we were able to look at some groups more specifically. For example, it is notable that there are fewer past year gamblers from Asian and Asian British groups. People from this ethnic group also have the most negative attitudes to gambling and those who do gamble are more likely to experience problems with their gambling behaviour.

Likewise, we found that younger people have the most favourable attitudes to gambling and older people have the least favourable attitudes. With recent changes in legislation and an increasing number of gambling products available, it will be of interest to see if these 'favourable' attitudes to gambling persist as this cohort (those currently aged under 35) grow older. It is the intention that the Gambling Prevalence Study should

be repeated every three years. Taking the 1999 and 2007 study results together therefore provides robust baseline data against which any future changes in gambling behaviour and attitudes can be compared.

## Methodology

- A sample of 10,144 private households in England, Scotland and Wales was randomly selected from the Post Code Address File.
- NatCen interviewers visited each address to attempt to gain co-operation. At co-operating households, one adult was interviewed to collect socio-economic information regarding the household, and demographic information about each person in the household. Every person aged 16 and over living at that household was then asked to fill in a self-completion booklet (or to complete the questionnaire online). 7% of respondents chose to complete the questionnaire online.
- In total, completed questionnaires were obtained from 9,003 adults. The overall response rate was 52%. The sample was weighted to be representative of the age, sex and regional distribution of the British population.
- The questionnaire developed for the 2007 study used the 1999 questionnaire as its base to maintain maximum comparability between the two years. The questionnaire was updated to include: new forms of gambling activity available since 1999; additional questions about socio-demographic characteristics; questions about health and lifestyle behaviours; attitude questions; a new problem gambling screen (PGSI); questions about net winnings and losses in the last seven days; and frequency of participating in any gambling activity in the last year.

The full report is available to download from the Gambling Commission website.

See <http://www.gamblingcommission.gov.uk>