

Report on the Individual Impacts of Gambling Addictions

**Citizens Advice East Herts
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This report summarises external research publications on how people can be affected by gambling addictions and problem gambling. Gambling can be hidden beneath problems such as debt or relationship troubles, making it harder to spot and support but it affects a large percentage of the population, whether directly or indirectly.

Gambling problems

Gambling addiction is an impulse control disorder. Addicted gamblers cannot control the impulse to gamble, even when it has negative consequences. Problem gambling is any gambling behaviour that disrupts life[1]. Popular activities include the national lottery, scratch cards and card games[2]. Gambling addiction or problem gambling is often associated with other behaviour or mood disorders. Many problem gamblers also suffer with substance abuse issues, unmanaged ADHD, stress, depression, anxiety, or bipolar disorder[3]. People with pre-existing mental health problems have a greater risk of developing issues with gambling than the general population[4]. Those with 'hidden addictions' such as gambling, are likely to turn to crime to pay off their debts or fund further gambling, making them more likely to enter the criminal justice system[5]. This shows how gambling can have a domino effect of further problems that can run into different areas of an individual's life.

The Cost of Gambling

Being a compulsive gambler can harm your health, relationships, and leave you in serious debt. In the UK it is estimated around 350,000 people suffer from a gambling addiction and approximately 430,000 adults are problem gamblers. Problems with gambling have increased with economic strain due to global recessions, suggesting the Covid-19 pandemic may also bring a rise. Moreover, there has been an increase in gambling outlets opening, and websites and games allowing 24-hour-access. Every day over £7 billion is spent on gambling and the addiction costs the UK £1.2 billion per year, with the gambling industry worth £14.5 billion in this country in 2018[6]. (Next update available end Nov 20.)

Overall, research suggests that nearly 5 million British people have experienced harm linked to gambling, accounting for the overlap between problem gamblers and those affected[7]. Worryingly, the NHS states that only 5% of gambling addicts seek help and only 1% receive treatment.

Gambling and COVID-19.

Between July and August 2020, 46% of Brits have gambled in some way[8]. During the current pandemic, the Gambling Commission have been reporting on trends within the gambling industry. This shows that 25% of recent gamblers have increased the time and/or money they spend on gambling activities during lockdown. This increased to 62% of more engaged gamblers who are spending more time and money on gambling than pre-lockdown. These numbers are expected to rise as more individuals try to cope with the feelings of strain of the pandemic on their finances and wellbeing[9].

The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) has requested regular intelligence from the industry on patterns of gambling during the coronavirus outbreak, including how operators are managing the risk of problem gambling and what more companies can do to promote safer messaging during the current crisis[10]. A paper published in April 2020 by authors including psychologists, public health experts and psychiatrists warned that the virus could have a huge long-term impact on the population's mental health as well as the more obvious physical impact. One author, Professor Rory O'Connor from University of Glasgow, wrote that an unfolding coronavirus mental health crisis could lead to an increase in substance abuse, alcoholism and gambling addiction, with a number of factors including loneliness, anxiety and stress creating 'a perfect storm' for mental health and wellbeing damage[11].

Gambling in East Herts

Although there are no specific statistics that show the level of gambling in the East Herts area, there are establishments and charities which aim to help those affected who live in the area (details below). The Covid pandemic has impacted service delivery of support and treatment services but many are continuing to support via phone and video. In the past 12 months Citizens Advice East Herts has assisted four individuals with problems linked to gambling, highlighting how it can be hidden behind debt problems or other addictions.

Who should you contact?

GamCare has established a Hertfordshire Problem Gambling Programme, with funding from the Hertfordshire Police and Crime Commissioner to tackle these issues. The programme has allowed them to research the link between problem gambling and the criminal justice system, as well as providing support and treatment for those who need it[12].

The Living Room Hertfordshire is a charity which aims to break the cycle of many substance and Behavioural addictions such as gambling. Call on 0300 365 0304[13]. Gambling Anonymous has groups in Bishops Stortford. Call on 0330 094 0322 or email s.info@gamblersanonymous.org.uk

References

[1] <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/addictions/gambling-addiction-and-problem-gambling.htm#:~:text=Gambling%20addiction%E2%80%94also%20known%20as,you%20or%20your%20loved%20ones>.

[2] <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/gambling-addiction/>

[3] <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/addictions/gambling-addiction-and-problem-gambling.htm#:~:text=Gambling%20addiction%E2%80%94also%20known%20as,you%20or%20your%20loved%20ones>.

[4] Gobet, F. and Schiller, M. eds., 2014. Problem gambling: Cognition, prevention and treatment. Springer.

[5] <https://www.gamcare.org.uk/news-and-blog/blog/gambling-and-the-criminal-justice-system/?cn-reloaded=1>

[6] <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/gambling-addiction>

[7] <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/gambling-addiction/>

[8] Ibid

[9] <https://www.rsph.org.uk/about-us/news/guest-blog-citizen-s-advice-on-gambling-harms.html#.Xw8j-SpwBu0.twitter>

[10] <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-urges-gambling-industry-to-tackle-risks-of-problem-gambling-during-coronavirus-outbreak>

[11] <https://rehabclinicsgroup.com/coronavirus-causing-a-mental-health-crisis-leading-to-alcoholism-and-gambling/>

[12] <https://www.gamcare.org.uk/news-and-blog/blog/gambling-and-the-criminal-justice-system/?cn-reloaded=1>

[13] <https://www.livingroomherts.org/gambling-addiction5>