

# research snapshot

summarize | mobilize



## Did people who play online casino change their gambling during the COVID-19 pandemic?

### What this research is about

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted daily life significantly. Many nations have responded to the pandemic by implementing lockdowns. Access to recreational activities is typically limited during lockdown. One consequence of the lockdown is that people who gamble have not been able to gamble in casinos or on sports. Unlike other countries, Sweden did not implement a full lockdown during the pandemic. Instead, the government encouraged spatial distancing among citizens.

The aim of this study was to examine the gambling behaviours of people who played online casino before and during the COVID-19 pandemic in Sweden. The authors used behavioural tracking data provided by a large European gambling company. This type of data has several advantages. It tends to have a large amount of people in the dataset. It also provides an objective and accurate way of assessing individual behaviour.

### What the researchers did

The dataset for this study came from a European online gambling company. It contained data from 133,286 Swedish adults. These people had wagered at least one bet on online casino websites owned by the company. The dataset spanned from January 1 to May 31, 2020.

The authors calculated the money spent and the number of people who gambled for each day during this period. They also used a player tracking tool, mentor, to categorize each player into low, medium, or high-risk gambling. Mentor uses information about the players' sessions, such as how long they spent gambling and whether they chased losses, to sort

### What you need to know

The COVID-19 pandemic has made access to land-based gambling more difficult or impossible in many countries. The aim of this study was to examine whether online gambling behaviours changed during the early phase of the pandemic in Sweden. The authors examined a large dataset of Swedish adults who played online casino. The dataset spanned from January to May 2020. This allowed the authors to compare online gambling behaviours before the pandemic to during it. They found that the number of people gambling online increased during the pandemic. However, the size of the average bet decreased. This suggests that while more people were gambling online, they were not spending as much money compared to before the pandemic. There was also evidence that people at high risk of having a problematic relationship with gambling decreased the intensity of their gambling during the pandemic.

them into risk categories. Chasing losses refers to any attempt to win back money that was lost in a gambling session.

### What the researchers found

First, some of the actual values (for instance, the daily amount of money wagered by each player) were not reported by the authors for confidentiality reasons. Thus, the authors did not track players individually over the five-month period.

The authors found that the average number of active players increased throughout the five-month period. They also noticed that the 24<sup>th</sup> or 25<sup>th</sup> of each month

resulted in the highest numbers of players for that month.

The authors calculated the average daily bet for each day. They did this by dividing the total amount of money bet on that day by the number of active players for that day. The average daily bet decreased over the five-month period. There were not any patterns to the days in a month that had the largest average daily bets.

Next, the authors wanted to know if the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in changes to the way that people gambled online. They found that the average daily bet on the final day included in the dataset (May 31) was 32% smaller than the first day included in the dataset (January 1).

The authors also wanted to know how gambling intensity affected the average daily bet. They defined people with high-intensity gambling as those whose average daily bet was higher than 90% and 99% of all bets placed that day. People with low-intensity gambling were those whose average daily bet was at 10% and 25% of all bets placed that day. They found that people with high-intensity gambling bet less during the pandemic compared to before. Interestingly, they also found that people with low-intensity gambling increased their average daily bet during the pandemic compared to before. It should be noted that the amount of money wagered by people with low-intensity gambling was relatively small.

Finally, the authors compared people in different risk levels. The number of people gambling daily who were classified as high-risk decreased over time. The number of people who were considered medium risk did not change over time.

### How you can use this research

This study adds to the small but growing body of literature on how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected people who gamble. Studies using participant self-report data have reported that people who gamble online have increased their gambling during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the results of this study indicate that in Sweden, people who play online

casino games have not increased their gambling during this time. The authors suggest that groups such as policy makers and regulators could rely more on objective data, such as the data used for this study. Previous research indicates that subjective data, such as self-report measures, may not be the most reliable way to assess gambling behaviours.

### About the researchers

**Michael Auer** is affiliated with neccton Ltd. in Lienz, Austria. **Mark Griffiths** is affiliated with the International Gaming Research Unit in the Psychology Department at Nottingham Trent University in Nottingham, UK. For more information about this study, please contact Mark Griffiths at [mark.griffiths@ntu.ac.uk](mailto:mark.griffiths@ntu.ac.uk)

### Citation

Auer, M., & Griffiths, M. D. (2021). Gambling before and during the COVID-19 pandemic among online casino gamblers: An empirical study using behavioral tracking data. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11469-020-00462-2>

### Study funding

No funding was declared for this study.

---

### About Gambling Research Exchange (GREO)

Gambling Research Exchange (GREO) has partnered with the Knowledge Mobilization Unit at York University to produce Research Snapshots. GREO is an independent knowledge translation and exchange organization that aims to eliminate harm from gambling. Our goal is to support evidence-informed decision making in safer gambling policies, standards, and practices. The work we do is intended for researchers, policy makers, gambling regulators and operators, and treatment and prevention service providers.

Learn more about GREO by visiting [greo.ca](http://greo.ca) or emailing [info@greo.ca](mailto:info@greo.ca).

