

# research snapshot

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## How has COVID-19 affected people's online gambling behaviours in Sweden?

### What this research is about

COVID-19 restrictions have increased the amount of time that people spend at home, on the internet, and worrying about the future. These restrictions may have affected people's gambling behaviour as well. Most sports betting stopped during COVID-19 because professional sporting events were cancelled. People who would normally bet on sports might have turned to play more addictive forms of gambling such as online casino games. At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Swedish government restricted the amount of gambling advertising and placed limits on the extent of online gambling available to people.

There is little research that investigates people's gambling behaviours during the COVID-19 pandemic. A previous study in Sweden suggested that people gambled slightly more during COVID-19, especially online. Some people turned to gamble on sports events that were still available, online casino, and horse racing. In this study, the researcher investigated the types of gambling games that people who gamble online in Sweden played in the past 30 days during May 2020. He also investigated whether there were differences between people who did online sports betting in the past 30 days and people who did not.

### What the researchers did

The researcher analyzed data from a larger study about online gambling in Sweden. The data for this study were collected in May 2020. Participants were 997 web panel members of a market survey company called Ipsos. People on the web panel regularly receive invitations to complete surveys. Participants must have gambled at least 10 times on sports betting or online casino games in the past year.

### What you need to know

This study explored the gambling behaviours of people in Sweden during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants gambled at least 10 times on sports betting or online casino games in the past year. They completed an online survey in May 2020. More participants engaged in online gambling than land-based gambling in the past 30 days. People who gamble online who played land-based gambling games and sports betting during the past 30 days had more severe gambling problems than those who did not. Horse race betting increased in the past 30 days, but people who bet on horse racing in the past 30 days had a lower risk of gambling problems. This suggested that some people with lower risk of gambling problems started horse betting during COVID-19. Prevention service providers can encourage people who continue to bet on sports during COVID-19 to participate in responsible gambling programs.

Participants completed an online survey. The survey collected their demographic information such as their age and gender. The survey asked if they had ever self-excluded from Sweden's national self-exclusion program. Self-exclusion is when people willingly ban themselves from online gambling websites or land-based venues for a period of time. Participants completed the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI). The PGSI assessed participants for problem gambling. Problem gambling is repetitive gambling behaviour that leads to negative consequences.

The survey asked participants whether they played a variety of online and land-based gambling activities in

the past 30 days and in the past year. The researcher compared participants who said they gambled in the past year but not in the past 30 days to participants who gambled in the past 30 days.

### What the researchers found

The majority of participants were men (75%). Problem gambling was more common among women than men (20% of women vs. 6% of men). The proportion of women with problem gambling might have increased in the past few years in Sweden.

Of the participants who gambled in the past 30 days, 9 in 10 played online casinos, 8 in 10 played online poker, and 7 in 10 played online bingo. Almost 9 in 10 gambled within video games. Other types of gambling occurred in lower frequency. About 6 in 10 bet on live sports betting or non-live sports betting, 5 in 10 played electronic gambling machines, 4 in 10 did land-based horse gambling, and 1 in 4 played land-based casino games. These findings suggest that a higher proportion of people did online gambling than land-based gambling during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Participants who did land-based casino gambling, land-based electronic machine gambling, and sports betting in the past 30 days were more likely to have problem gambling than participants who played these games in the past year but not in the past 30 days. This finding suggests that people who continued to do land-based gambling or sports betting during COVID-19 might have more serious gambling problems than people who stopped.

Participants who did online horse betting in the past 30 days were less likely to have problem gambling. This finding suggests that people with fewer gambling problems might have started horse betting during COVID-19. The number of people who did horse betting increased during COVID-19.

Participants who did sports betting in the past 30 days were more likely to play online and land-based casino gambling, online and land-based poker, and land-based electronic gambling machines. They were more likely to have trouble paying their bills and to have more serious gambling problems. These findings

suggest that people who played gambling games that were largely cancelled during COVID-19 might be at higher risk of gambling problems.

### How you can use this research

Prevention service providers can use this research to encourage people who continue to bet on sports during COVID-19 to participate in safer gambling programs. Researchers can investigate different interventions and strategies that may prevent excessive gambling during COVID-19. More research is needed to explore people's gambling patterns over time during COVID-19 and afterwards.

### About the researchers

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### 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).

