

research snapshot

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An examination of gambling, smoking, and alcohol use among adults in Great Britain

What this research is about

People may experience harm because of gambling. Gambling-related harms can include financial difficulties, decreases in personal and family well-being, and physical and mental health problems. Gambling may be linked to other addictive behaviours (e.g., cigarette smoking and alcohol use). In the United Kingdom, it is currently legal for adults (18+ years) to smoke, use alcohol, and gamble. Previous research has found mixed evidence on the link between gambling disorder and the use of substances. The purpose of this study was to examine the intersection of gambling (across all risk levels) with smoking and alcohol use.

What the researchers did

The researchers used data from the Smoking and Alcohol Toolkit Study (STS/ATS) collected in October 2022. The STS/ATS is an ongoing survey administered to a new sample of about 2400 adults (16+ years) living in the United Kingdom each month. The study uses a hybrid of random location and quota sampling and involves telephone interviews. Survey weighting is performed to match the sample to the socio-demographic profile in Great Britain.

For the current study, only data from adults (18+ years) who completed the survey in October 2022 were used. Of note, because of funding constraints, questions related to the Problem Gambling Severity Index and weekly gambling spending were only asked to around 88% of the participants who reported gambling in the past year.

The researchers analyzed the following measures in this study:

What you need to know

The purpose of this study was to examine the intersection of gambling (across all risk levels) with smoking and alcohol use. The researchers used data from the Smoking and Alcohol Toolkit Study (STS/ATS). Only data from 2,398 adults (18+ years) who were living in Great Britain and completed the survey in October 2022 were included in the analysis. In the overall sample, about 44% gambled in the past year. Among those who reported any gambling activity in the past year, 7% were classified as being at any-risk of harm from gambling. About 0.3% had disordered gambling.

No statistically significant link was found between any risk of harm from gambling and current cigarette smoking or drinking at increasing and higher-risk levels. But compared to those who did not gamble, those who gambled were more likely to smoke (16% vs. 13%) and drink at increasing and higher-risk levels (41% vs. 28%). Weekly gambling spending was higher among those who smoked (£8.09) or drank at increasing and higher-risk levels (£10.74), compared to those who did not smoke (£7.61) or drink at increasing and high-risk levels (£5.26).

- Types of gambling in the past year (e.g., lotteries, slot machines, and bingo)
- Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI). Scores between 1 and 7 were categorized as “at-risk” gambling. A score of 8+ was categorized as “disordered gambling.” Participants who scored 1+ were considered to have “any-risk” of harm from gambling.

- Weekly spending on gambling, smoking, and/or alcohol
- Current smoking status
- Level of alcohol use, measured using the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test-Concise (AUDIT-C). Those who scored 4+ were classified as drinking alcohol at increasing and higher-risk levels.
- Social grade based on occupation
- Age
- Sex
- Region in Great Britain at the time of the survey

What the researchers found

A weighted total of 2,398 adults (18+ years) were included in the analysis. The average age was 48 years old. A total of 14.5% of participants were currently smoking, while 33% were drinking at increasing and higher-risk levels.

In the overall sample, 43.6% gambled in the past year. Among those who reported any gambling activity in the past year, 7.3% were classified as being at any-risk of harm from gambling. About 0.3% had disordered gambling. The average weekly spending on gambling was £4.80 among those who gambled but had “no risk”. But among those were classified as at any risk of harm from gambling, the average spending was £45.68.

The researchers did not find a statistically significant link between any risk of harm from gambling and current smoking or drinking at increasing and higher-risk levels. In this analysis, the researchers controlled for age, sex, social grade, and region. But compared to those who did not gamble, those who gambled were more likely to smoke (16% vs. 13%) and drink at increasing and higher-risk levels (41% vs. 28%).

Weekly gambling spending was higher among those who smoked (£8.09) or drank at increasing and higher-risk levels (£10.74) compared to those who did not smoke (£7.61) or drink at increasing and higher-risk levels (£5.26).

How you can use this research

Practitioners can use this research to inform how they treat people experiencing gambling-related harms

and other addictive behaviours (e.g., smoking and drinking). Further long-term data collection will help to better understand the intersection of gambling, smoking, and alcohol use.

About the researchers

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Citation

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