

# research snapshot

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## Exploring online sports betting as a public health issue for young adult men in the United Kingdom

### What this research is about

Online sports betting has become popular in the United Kingdom (UK). Gambling companies now offer sports betting via mobile apps, which allow people to bet at anytime and anywhere on their cell phones. Further, policy makers have made gambling advertising policies less strict. Football and horse betting are the most popular sports betting games in the UK. They make a lot of profit for the online gambling sector.

Gambling brands and products are a big part of sports. Gambling operators advertise their gambling products on social media and television, and sponsor professional sports clubs. Some athletes are hired to promote gambling products. Gambling companies also offer gambling promotions to young men during live sporting events. Many researchers and policy makers think that sports betting is a public health concern, especially for young adults. In this study, the researchers explored how mobile apps have affected young men's attitudes and experiences with sports betting.

### What the researchers did

The researchers used advertising on social media and a project website to recruit participants for their study. They enrolled a total of 32 men from Bristol, England and Derry, Northern Ireland. Participants were 18 to 35 years old. They bet regularly on sports online and made at least one bet per week. Participants were not in treatment for any addictions, anxiety, or depression.

The study had three phases. In the first phase, the researchers put participants into focus groups to explore their experiences, attitudes, and thoughts

### What you need to know

In this study, the researchers explored how gambling mobile apps have affected young men's attitudes and experiences with sports betting. They enrolled 32 men in their study. Participants were 18 to 35 years old, and regularly engaged in online sports betting. They made at least one bet per week. The researchers explored participants' experiences, attitudes, and thoughts about sports betting in focus groups and interviews. Some participants also kept a 30-day diary to reflect on their gambling behaviour. The researchers identified four themes. The first is that gambling has become a normal part of sports leagues and events, and affects young men's enjoyment of sports. The second is that mobile apps increase young men's access to sports betting and entice them to gamble. The third theme is gambling promotions may encourage young men to make risky choices when they gamble. The fourth theme is online sports betting may lead to harms. These results suggest a need for stronger regulations of gambling advertising and sponsorship in sports.

about sports betting. In the second phase, participants kept a diary for a month about their gambling behaviour. They recorded the number of bets they made each time they gambled. They recorded the amount of time and money they spent gambling. They also described the places where they gambled and if they were gambling with other people. In the third phase, the researchers interviewed eight participants. They asked these participants to explain how their gambling behaviour had affected their social life, financial situation, and overall health.

## What the researchers found

The researchers identified four themes that participants mentioned most often. The first theme is that sports betting is a normal part of being a sports fan. Some participants said that gambling makes sports games more enjoyable to watch. Participants also said that sports betting is a way for them to socialize with their friends.

The second theme is that mobile apps encourage young adult men to participate in sports betting. Many participants said they gamble more often when they use gambling apps on their cell phone. They always have access to sports betting and can gamble anywhere they want. Some participants said that it feels more socially acceptable to gamble online than in a betting shop.

The third theme is that gambling promotions encourage young adult men to make their bets. Some participants said that they set up many different sports betting accounts with online gambling operators so they could qualify for promotions such as free bets.

The fourth theme is that online sports betting may lead to gambling-related harms. Some participants ended up with a lot of debt because of too much sports betting. They said that their gambling hurt their relationships with family members and employers. Some participants had suffered mental health issues from sports betting. Participants said they failed to understand how risky sports betting could be.

These findings suggest that gambling has become a normal part of sports leagues and events. Gambling mobile apps increase young men's access to sports betting and entice them to gamble. Promotions may encourage young men to make risky choices when they gamble. Young men may try to get rich from gambling. They may become so wrapped up in sports betting that they do not see how risky it really is.

## How you can use this research

Policy makers could work with public health professionals and the public to create educational materials that teach young adults about the harms of

online gambling. Policy makers could also develop policies to restrict the number of promotions gambling companies can offer. Researchers could use this research to investigate how gambling promotions affect young adults' gambling behaviour and overall health. They could also explore whether allowing gambling advertising during live broadcasts before 9 p.m. affects young adults' attitudes about gambling in sports.

## About the researchers

**Darragh McGee** is affiliated with the Department for Health at the University of Bath in the UK. For more information about this study, please contact Darragh McGee at [D.McGee@bath.ac.uk](mailto:D.McGee@bath.ac.uk) or [darraghmcgee@outlook.com](mailto:darraghmcgee@outlook.com).

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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).

