

# research snapshot

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## Brief intervention may be useful at reducing ex-offenders' gambling behaviour

### What this research is about

This research tests the usefulness of a brief intervention for ex-offenders with gambling disorder (GD). GD is repetitive gambling behaviour that leads to negative consequences. These may include money problems, relationship issues, and mental health problems. There is not much research about GD and its treatment within the criminal justice system. Criminals are much more likely than the general population to suffer from GD. Many criminals do not know they have a gambling problem and do not get help. The criminal justice system is generally unaware of how much harm GD causes criminals, their families, and the wider society. Evidence suggests that criminals with severe GD are more likely to commit crimes in the future.

Few people get professional help for their GD. There are different types of gambling treatments. One type is called a brief intervention. During a brief intervention, a clinician has a short conversation with a patient about their gambling behaviour. The purpose is to help people understand how their gambling behaviour causes them harm and suggest ways to reduce gambling behaviour. Brief intervention can also be delivered online.

People's gambling attitudes affect their gambling behaviour. Gambling attitudes refer to people's beliefs about gambling in general. Evidence suggests that people who have positive attitudes about gambling are more likely to suffer gambling problems. In this study, the researchers investigated the gambling attitudes of ex-offenders who were on probation, parole, or supervised release. They also explored whether a brief intervention changed the

### What you need to know

The researchers explored ex-offenders' gambling attitudes and behaviour and whether a brief intervention could be useful for those with probable gambling disorder (GD). The researchers recruited 126 people on probation, parole, or supervised release. Participants completed an online survey. The researchers randomly assigned 102 participants with probable GD to either receive a brief intervention plus treatment referral or just referral. Both groups developed more negative attitudes about gambling, spent less money, and gambled less often at one month after the study. This finding suggests that a brief intervention may be useful in reducing criminals' gambling behaviour. This study has implications for screening and treating gambling problems within the criminal justice system.

gambling attitudes and behaviour of ex-offenders with gambling problems.

### What the researchers did

The researchers recruited people on probation, parole, and supervised release in Illinois, United States. Probation is when officers supervise criminals in the community. Parole is when criminals are released from jail early and agree to follow certain rules. Supervised release is when officers supervise criminals recently released from jail. The researchers also used flyers and advertisements to recruit participants. Participants were 126 adults who were 18 years of age or older and spoke English. Most participants were men (87%).

Participants completed an online survey at the beginning of the study. The survey collected their demographic information. Participants completed the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI). The PGSI assessed participants for GD. The Gambling Composite Index of Addiction Severity Index assessed their gambling behaviour and if they thought they had a gambling problem. The Attitudes Towards Gambling Scale-8 (ATGS-8) assessed whether participants had positive or negative attitudes about gambling.

The researchers randomly assigned 102 participants with probable GD (PGSI score of 3 or higher) to one of two groups. One group received the brief intervention plus referral to treatment, and the other group only received a treatment referral. The brief intervention was 10 minutes long. It was online. These participants completed the ATGS-8 again after the intervention and/or referral. They also completed the ATGS-8, the Gambling Composite Index of Addiction Severity Index, and the Gambling Treatment and Utilization Questionnaire one month after the study ended.

### What the researchers found

The researchers identified 102 participants as having probable GD (86%). This finding suggests that GD is common among criminals. Participants with probable GD had more positive attitudes about gambling than did participants without GD. Only about 1 in 5 participants had ever been treated for their gambling problems. Most participants with probable GD had been treated in the past for alcohol and drug addictions. This finding suggests that people with GD are more likely to pursue and receive treatment for alcohol and drug addictions. Participants chose not to pursue GD treatment because they thought it would be unhelpful. Many participants also denied they had a gambling problem.

Both groups that received the brief intervention or just referral developed more negative attitudes about gambling, spent less money on gambling, and gambled less often at one month after the study. This finding suggests that a brief intervention may be useful at reducing criminals' gambling behaviour. Participants with negative attitudes about gambling were more likely to pursue the treatment referrals.

### How you can use this research

Policy makers could use this research to include gambling treatment in alcohol and drug addiction programs in prison. More research is needed to determine if brief interventions are more useful if they are delivered online or in-person, and within alcohol and drug addiction programs or separately.

### About the researchers

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### Citation

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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).

