

YOUNG PEOPLE WHO GAMBLE IN IRELAND

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INTRODUCTION

Globally, there has been a huge increase in gambling availability and participation in the last thirty years. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, traditional (offline) modes of gambling have declined, while there has been a substantial rise in internet-enabled access to gambling. Studies tend to find that problem gambling is in the range of 1% to 3% of the population, peaking before the age of 30. Young people are the highest risk cohort of exposure to, and engagement in, online gambling, and young adults may be at a heightened risk of engaging in problem gambling. In this study, we examined factors which may be predictive of young people's likelihood to engage in online gambling activities and regularly gambling.

DATA AND METHODS

The *Growing Up in Ireland* study is used to examine the characteristics and background factors which predict whether 20-year-olds report engaging regularly in gambling, and gambling via online channels. Data on over 4,500 young people who were interviewed in 2015-16 when the study participants were 17/18 years and followed up in 2018-29 when they were 20 years provide the sample for analysis. Of particular interest was the association between gambling behaviours and team sports participation over time. Other potential influences on gambling behaviours were also accounted for in the analysis, such as sex, whether the young person was in education or in employment, whether the young person was residing outside the family home, the household socio-economic background of the young person, as well as health-related risk behaviours the young person may undertake including smoking, alcohol consumption, and having reported ever using cannabis. A measure of their willingness to take risks was also included, as well as whether they were engaged in individual-level sports and other group activities. Finally, further exploiting the longitudinal nature of the data, the models of gambling

¹ This Bulletin summarizes the findings from: Duggan, B. and Mohan, G. "A longitudinal examination of young people's gambling behaviours and participation in team sports", *Journal of Gambling Studies*. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10899-022-10175-x>

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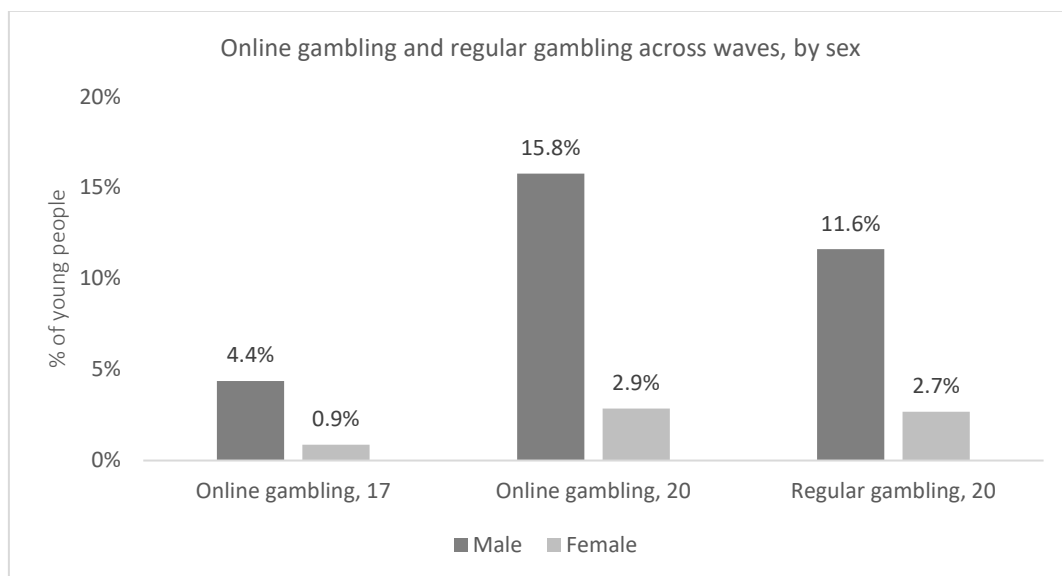
² This research was supported by the Electronic Communications Research Programme at the ESRI, funded as joint research programme by the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (DECC) and the Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg).

behaviours at 20 years control for where the young person reported engaging in gambling online at 17/18 years.

RESULTS

At 20 years, 9.3% were engaging in online gambling (up from 2.6% at 17 years), and 7.2% were regularly gambling. Figure 1 breaks the gambling behaviours down by sex, showing a much greater prevalence for males. The results from statistical modelling indicate that playing team sports is strongly associated with engagement in regular gambling as well as online gambling, independent of socio-demographic and other risk factors for *males* but not for *females*. Moreover, a longer period of participation in team sports is associated with a higher likelihood of engaging in gambling compared to shorter periods. Males and those reporting prior engagement with online gambling at age 17 were more likely to gamble online at 20. Being in employment, compared to in education, was associated with frequently gambling, while living at a non-parental address was estimated to reduce the likelihood of gambling compared to living with parents. More regular alcohol consumption and cannabis use was associated with regularly gambling.

FIGURE 1: PARTICIPATION IN ONLINE GAMBLING AND REGULARLY GAMBLING, BY SEX



CONCLUSIONS

This study documents almost a four-fold increase in engagement in online gambling among a nationally representative cohort of young people in Ireland between the ages of 17/18 and 20 years. The increase is driven by males, where the prevalence of gambling rose from 4% to 16%. Over time, participation in team sports, is revealed to have a dose-response like association with online and regularly gambling for young males. The findings provide support for the theory that the social norms that develop within the young male adult sports team environment may play a role in generating increased gambling behaviour, in both online and traditional modes, among team members. In Ireland the proposed Gambling Regulation Bill advises the establishment of a Gambling Regulatory

Authority of Ireland under which public education and awareness programmes, and community intervention for gambling addiction, is proposed. The findings of this research provide evidence to inform the development of policies and legislation in the area of online and regular gambling, and its links to young people and sports participation. The research suggests that there should be a targeted focus on higher risk groups of the population such as sports teams and more extremely, legislation could be introduced to restrict gambling advertising in sports.

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