



Children and gambling – evidence to inform regulation and responses in Ireland

Plain language summary

Dr Helen McAvoy, Dr Ciara Reynolds, Salome Sunday,
Professor Joan Hanafin, Professor Luke Clancy



What is this report about?

This report is about the gambling activities of 16-year-olds in Ireland. It is part of work to develop regulations, policies and services to protect children from gambling harms. Gambling can harm mental health, relationships, and cause addiction.

The report was developed by researchers in the TobaccoFree Research Institute and the Institute of Public Health.

What information is the report based on?

The report uses data from a survey called the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs (ESPAD).

The ESPAD survey is carried out in 35 countries. It asks 16-year-olds about their use of gambling products such as slot machines and lotteries.

This report uses survey information collected from 16-year-olds in Ireland in 2019. It analyses this information to find out:

- how many 16-year-olds gambled for money
- what other aspects of the teenagers' lives were associated with gambling
- the types of gambling were used by this age group and whether they gambled online
- what proportion of them experienced excessive and problem gambling
- which factors were linked with difficulties around gambling
- the differences in gambling between boys and girls.

How was gambling defined in this report?

The main report defines gambling, online gambling, forms of gambling, problem gambling and excessive gambling.

The prevalence of gambling (how common gambling is among the people surveyed) was estimated based on the number of 16-year-olds who said they had gambled for money in the last 12 months on any of these four forms of gambling:

- using slot machines
- playing cards or dice
- playing lotteries (also includes scratch cards and bingo)
- betting on sports or animals.



Definitions of problem gambling and excessive gambling

A 16-year-old was considered to be problem gambling if they said they had:

- lied to people important to them about how much money they had gambled and
- felt the need to bet more and more money.

Excessive gambling was identified when a teenager was:

- gambling very often,
- spending a lot of time on gambling on a typical day,
- spending more than two hours gambling on a single occasion.

How common was gambling among 16-year-olds in Ireland?

Between 1 in 4 and 1 in 5 16-year-olds said they had gambled for money in the last 12 months. Gambling for money was more common among boys than girls.

What aspects of the teenagers' lives were associated with gambling for money?

Gambling for money in the last 12 months was more common among 16-year-olds who:

- were boys
- lived in homes where the parents were less aware of their whereabouts
- used social media for more than an hour on school and non-school days
- used other substances, including tobacco, e-cigarettes, cannabis or alcohol
- took part in gaming at least monthly
- were involved in serious arguments or had experienced trouble with the police.

The three factors most strongly associated with gambling for money were male gender, alcohol use and trouble with the police.



What types of gambling were the most common?

Betting on sports or animals was the most common form of gambling among 16-year-olds. The next most common were lotteries, playing cards or dice, and slot machines.

What do we know about teenagers betting on sports or animals?

Of the 16-year-olds who gambled in the last 12 months, 6 in 10 had placed a bet on sports or animals.

Of those who gambled in the last 12 months on sports or animals, 7 in 10 were boys.

Betting on sports or animals was associated with male gender, higher academic achievement, alcohol use and trouble with the police.

What do we know about teenagers who gamble in other ways?

The proportions of 16-year-olds gambling for money in the last 12 months with lotteries or using cards or dice were similar, at 4 in 10 (lotteries) and 5 in 10 (cards or dice).

Slot machines were less common, used by around 3 in 10 of the 16-year-olds who said they gambled for money in the last year.

What do we know about teenagers who gamble online?

Almost a quarter of 16-year-olds who gambled in the last 12 months gambled online.

Online gambling was strongly linked with betting on sports or animals but not with any other forms of gambling.

Online gambling was associated with both excessive gambling and problem gambling.

What do we know about excessive gambling among teenagers?

Among those 16-year-olds who gambled in the last 12 months, around 1 in 10 engaged in excessive gambling.

Being male, gaming, using e-cigarettes, using tobacco, heavy episodic drinking, experiencing trouble with the police and deliberate self-harm were associated with excessive gambling.

Excessive gambling was associated with online gambling and betting on sports or animals, slot machines and playing cards or dice, but it was not associated with lotteries.

16-year-olds who gambled online were 4.2 times as likely to experience excessive gambling.

What do we know about problem gambling among teenagers?

Among those 16-year-olds who said they gambled for money in the last 12 months, around 1 in 18 experienced problem gambling.

Lying to important people about how much money they gambled was associated with online gambling and all four forms of gambling investigated.

Feeling the need to bet more and more money was associated with online gambling, slot machines and betting on sports or animals, but not with lotteries or playing cards or dice.

What do we know about differences in gambling in boys and girls?

Both boys and girls reported gambling in the last 12 months, but 6 in 10 of those were boys.

Boys and girls had different profiles of gambling activity. Of those 16-year-olds who gambled in the last 12 months, it was more common for boys to:

- gamble online
- bet on sports or animals
- gamble excessively
- experience problem gambling.

Of those who gambled in the last 12 months and were experiencing excessive or problem gambling, 80% were boys.

Of those who gambled in the last 12 months:

- excessive gambling was around three times more common among boys than girls
- problem gambling was over two and a half times more common among boys than girls.



Gambling among 16 year olds in Ireland in the last 12 months

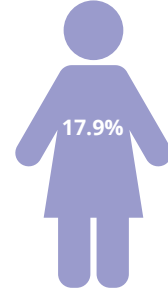


22.9%

GAMBLING FOR MONEY



28.2%



17.9%

FORMS OF BETTING



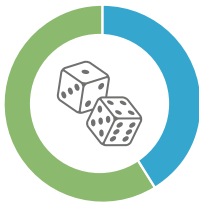
60.7%

BETTING ON SPORTS OR ANIMALS



51.8%

LOTTERIES



41.3%

PLAYING CARDS OR DICE



36.9%

SLOT MACHINES

Problem and excessive gambling among 16 year olds in the last 12 months

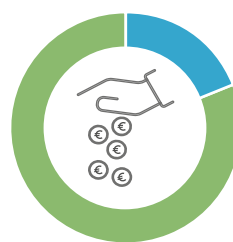
PROBLEM GAMBLING IN THOSE WHO GAMBLED IN LAST 12 MONTHS

FELT THE NEED TO LIE ABOUT THEIR GAMBLING



8.1%

FELT THE NEED TO BET MORE AND MORE MONEY



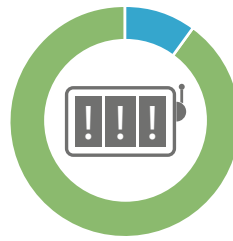
19.0%

DIFFICULTY CONTROLLING THEIR GAMBLING*



21.3%

EXPERIENCED EXCESSIVE GAMBLING**



10.3%

5.6% OF THOSE WHO GAMBLED IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS EXPERIENCED PROBLEM GAMBLING



* Score of 1 - either lied about money spent on gambling or felt the need to bet more and more money.
** Please refer to definitions on page 3

Institute of
Public Health



publichealth.ie

Dublin Office

700 South Circular Road
Dublin 8
DO8 NH90, Ireland
T: + 353 1 478 6300

Belfast Office

6th Floor, City Exchange
11-13 Gloucester Street
Belfast
BT1 4LS, Northern Ireland
T: + 44 28 90 648494

info@publichealth.ie

🐦 publichealth.ie