

Covid-19 and Gambling; Impact and Adaptation

Nigel Turner

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

Disclosure of Potential Conflict of Interest

Presenter Disclosure

- I have no potential conflicts of interest for my presentation.
- Collaborators: Mark van der Maas, Steve Cook, Jing Shi
- Seneca students: Tessa Bound, Chelsea Wood, & Valeria Ciric
- Funding: Ministry of Health and Long Term Care

Disclosure of Potential Conflict of Interest

Presenter Disclosure

- **Grants/Research Support:** Dr. Turner has received funding from the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, The Ontario Problem Gambling Research Centre now call Gambling Research Exchange, the National Center for Responsible Gambling (NCRG), and from Ontario Lottery and Gaming (OLG).
- In all cases, the contract included guarantees of independence and intellectual property rights.

Part 1: COVID-19

- **Disruption of life around the world**
- **150 million people infected**
- **Over 3 million deaths**
- **Economies in shatters**

COVID-19

- People shut in homes
- Working at home
- Lost jobs
- Overwhelmed medical facilities
- The largest vaccine program in history.

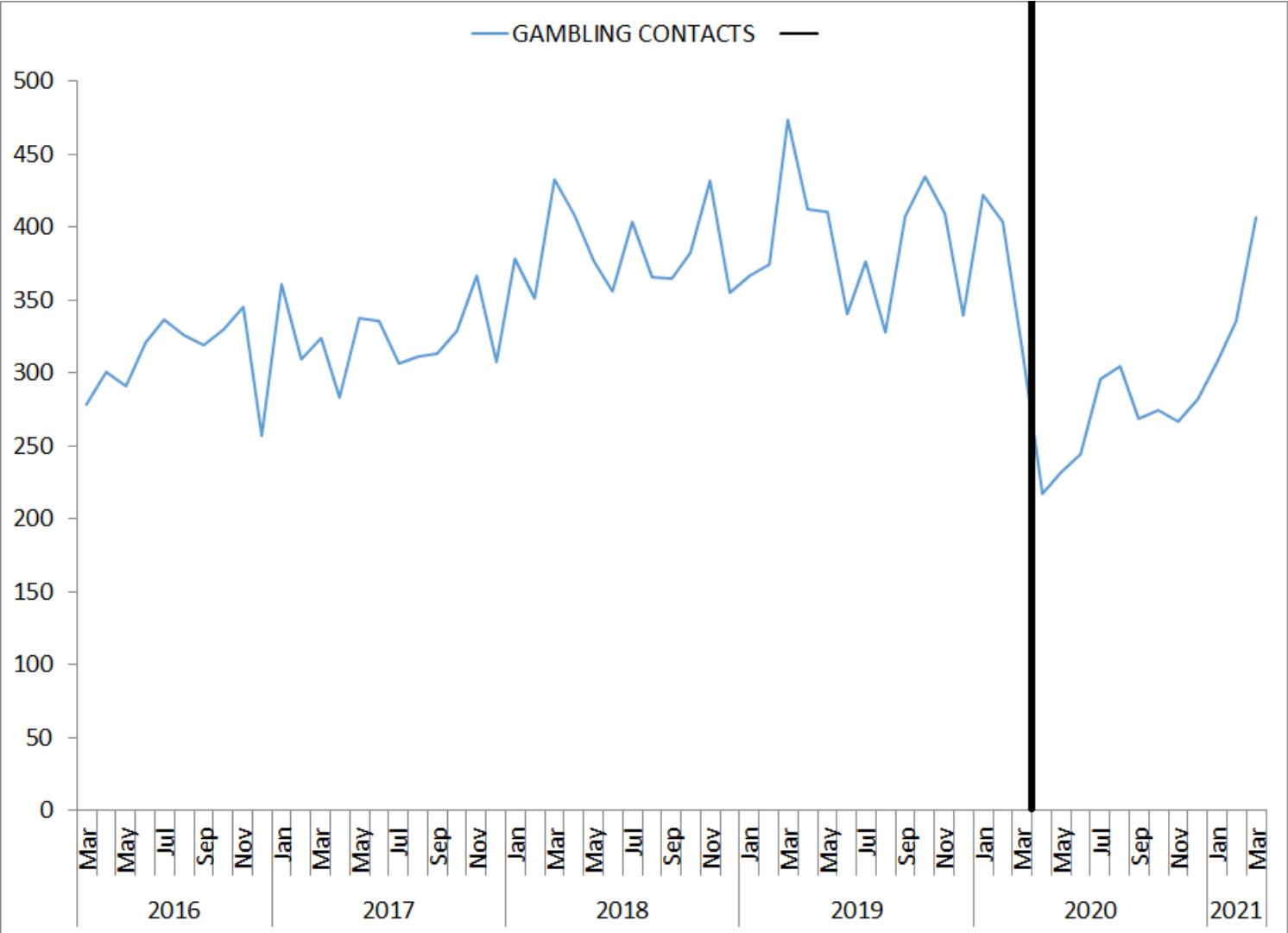
Gambling

- Casinos closed or limited access
- Gambling revenue in the US dropped sharply from \$11B USD per Quarter in the 4th quarter of 2019 to just over \$2B USD during the 2nd Quarter of 2020 (American Gaming Association, 2020).
- 11% global decrease in gambling revenue
- 15% global increase in online gambling revenue
- In Ontario gambling revenue is down 2 billion in 2020

Part 2: Helpline calls

- Last summer in an editorial I took a look at the helpline calls in Ontario.
- The most startling thing was a sharp drop in helpline calls regarding gambling as a result of the pandemic.
- Little sign of migration from casino gambling to online gambling
- I took another look in October, and there was some sign of migration to online gambling
- I then looked again last week

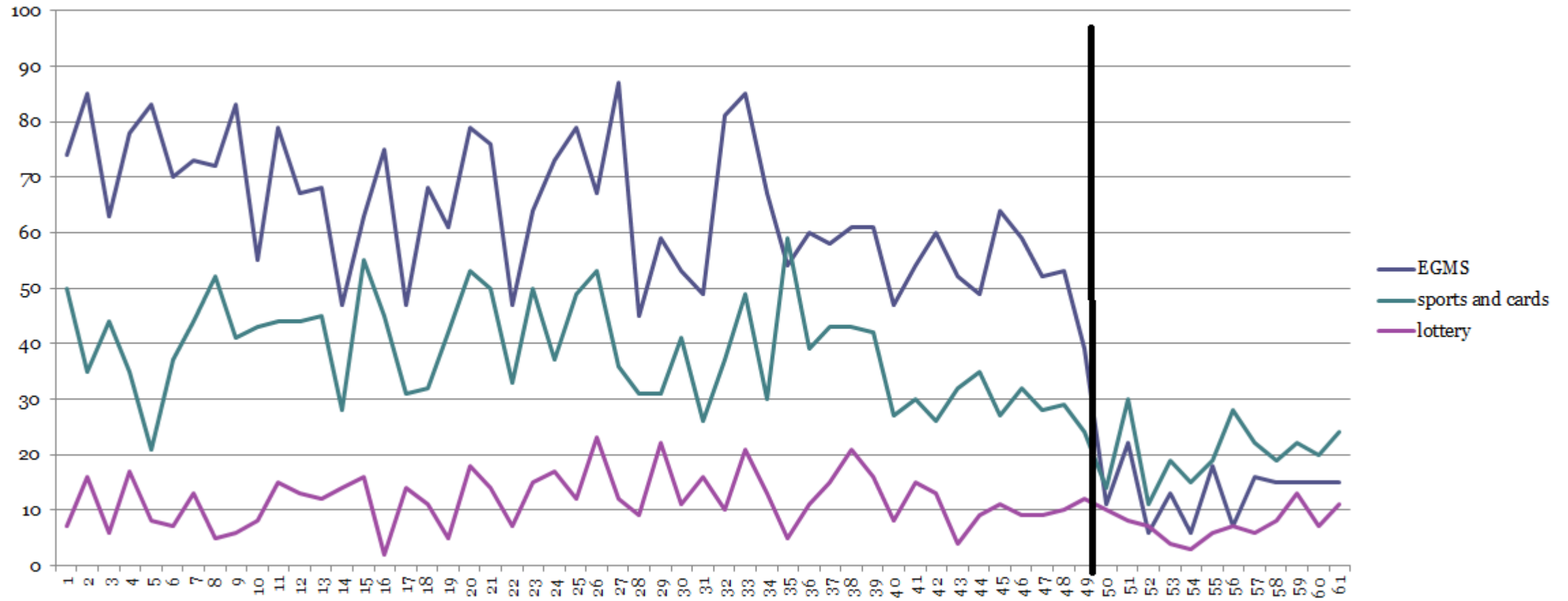
Helpline calls



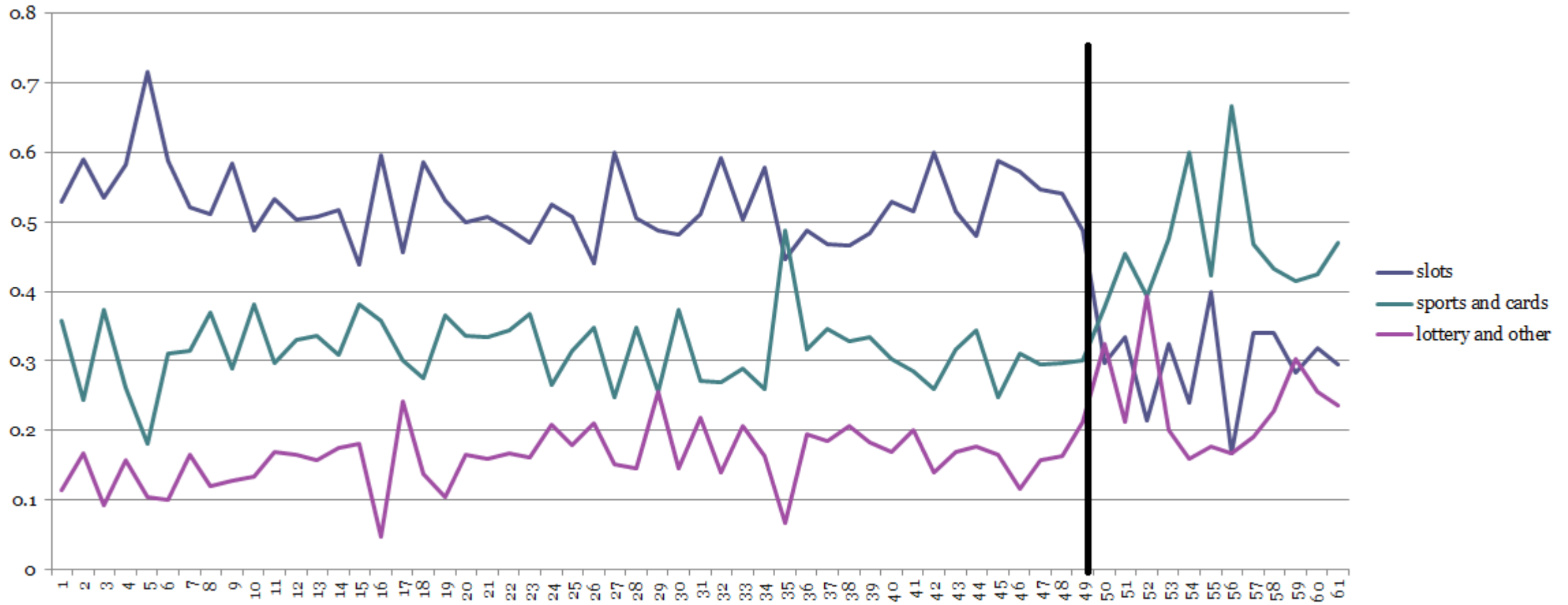
Helpline

- Strong drop due to the pandemic.
- Sustained for a while
- A recent increase in gambling related helpline calls (still in lockdown)
- These results are consistent with those reported yesterday by Dr. Leonard.

Games played



Percentage of all calls



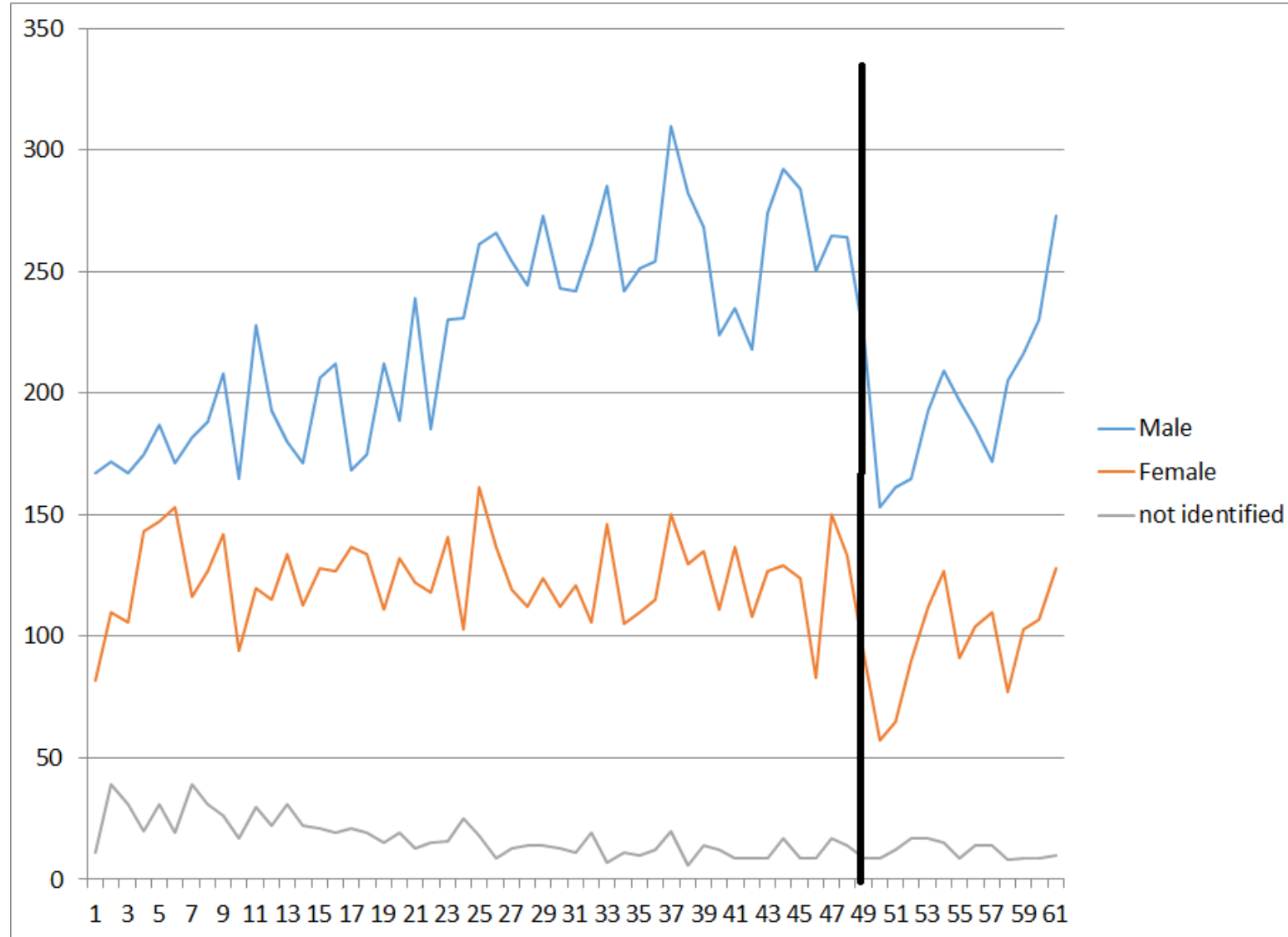
Games

- All games dropped during the pandemic
- The largest drop was for EGMs
- There was a shift in the relative importance of EGMs vs. Sports and Cards.
- Consistent with a shift towards online gambling.

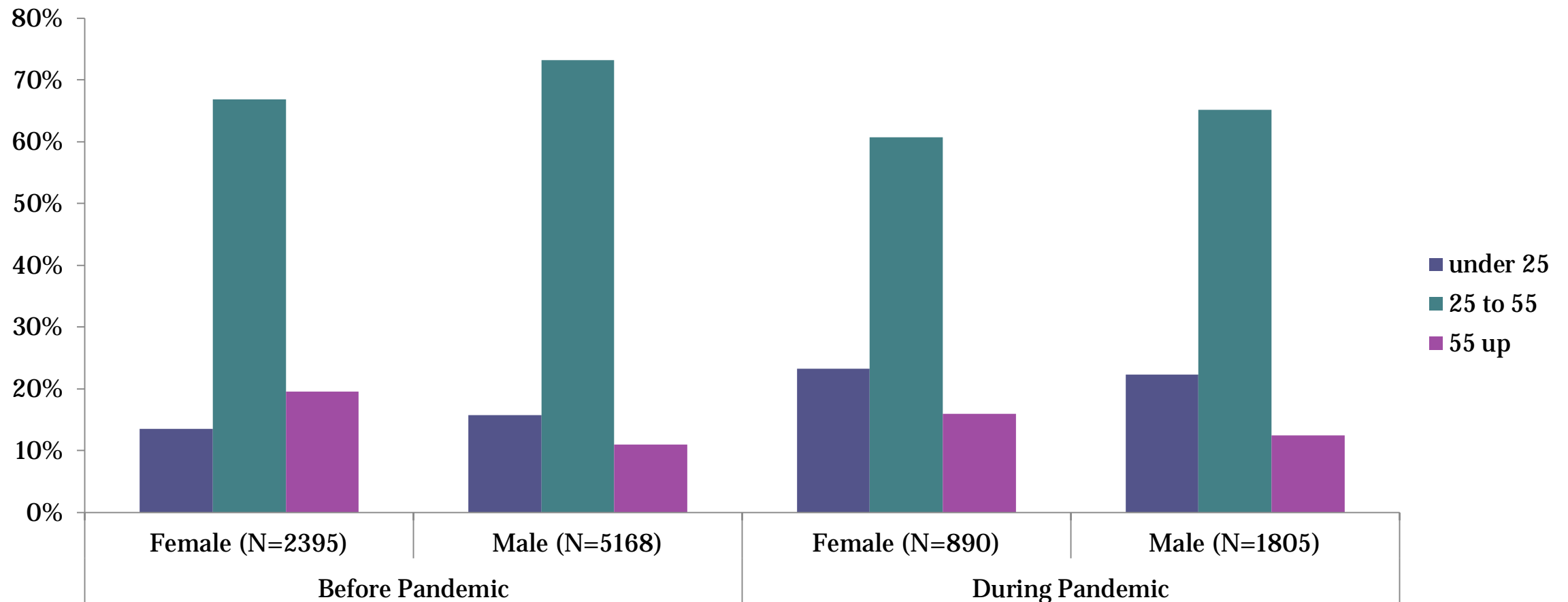
Other changes

- Prior to the pandemic 64% of callers who identified a gender were male.
- During the pandemic this increased to 67% of callers who identified a gender were male.
- This difference is barely significant ($p = .045$)
- But probably not a pandemic effect, there was a long term trend of increasing numbers of male.

Gender



Significant increase in calls from younger gamblers.



Helpline calls

- Suggests an initial drop in helpline calls as a result of the decrease in availability
- A shift in terms of relative importance of EGM vs sports and cards
- A small shift towards younger gamblers
- Consistent with a shift towards internet gambling over time amongst a minority of players

Part 3: Survey of clinicians

- Wanted to find out clinicians they are coping with pandemic
- Anonymous online survey
- Started in April, 2021, so far 9 respondents (please complete)
 - 2 mental health/addiction counsellors,
 - 3 were specialized problem gambling
 - 3 were “social workers”
 - 1 psychotherapist

Prior to Pandemic

- Individual = 5
- Family = 4
- Group = 4
- Case management = 3
- Responsible gambling staff in a casino = 1
- Prevention = 2
- Education/guidance = 3

Modified delivery of services

- 42% Cancelled face to face appointments
- 14% Reduced frequency of appointments
- 71% Did consultation / treatment by phone or video
- 57% Participants require masks for appointments
- 57% Other social distancing measures.

Methods of contact during Covid-19

- **86% Telephone counselling.**
- **14% Telephone conference calls with multiple clients**
- **43% Face-to-face individual**
- **14% Face-to-face group**
- **43% Email**
- **57% Video calling**
- **29% Group Video calling**

Challenges faced during the pandemic.

- Clients falling asleep in group sessions
- Clients not dressed appropriately
- Smoking during group sessions
- Clients being in car
- Clients not having privacy for treatment sessions
- Being on phone during group sessions

Populations most concerned about

- Those experiencing poverty
- People with little access
 - to phones
 - phone plans
 - No WIFI or poor internet connections
- People with low computer literacy
- People experiencing poverty
- Seniors

Training needs

- **All participants reported needing training and knowledge sharing on innovation and lessons learned on adapting counselling practices during the pandemic.**

Preferred knowledge exchange method

- 14% Traditional Conferences (with adequate social distancing)
- 43% Professional Community of practice website
- 71% eLearning
- 57% Self-directed training
- 29% Face-to-face training
- 71% Webinars
- 57% Fact sheets

Impact of Covid

- **Less engagement with colleagues; missing colleagues; feeling isolated**
- **Constant changes to the way work is done; out of comfort zone**
- **Provincial messaging never clear (are we essential workers or not?)**
- **No real downtime /no time between family role and work role / working at home with kids**
- **Limited self-care options /limited hobbies, leisure and social connections**
- **Loss of family members / loss of family/friend interaction**
- **Stressed out; burnt out; anxiety & depression symptoms; feeling overwhelmed, exhausted**

Psychological distress (using K-6)

- **57% scored as being psychologically distressed**
- **86% said they were more distressed this year than before the pandemic**

Wish list for help with the pandemic or future pandemics?

- **More ways to connect with colleagues / Better community for frontline workers to share experiences**
- **Upgrades to communications platforms (e.g., OTN)**
- **Shorter work days to balance demands at home and the effort that online/telephone work requires compared to in-person work**
- **Better options for Self-care**
- **Training**
- **More flexibility and adjustment time provided by employers**

Conclusions: Effect of pandemic on clinicians

- Most respondents reported their work environment as a factor that has been impacted by the pandemic, with an emphasis on social connection and a shift in their role at work.
- Many participants also expressed that their relationships with friends and family were also significantly impacted by the pandemic.
- The pandemic has caused significant emotional distress for respondents, as many stated that they felt “isolated”, “stressed out”, or “burned out.”

Contact

- Contact: Nigel_Turner@camh.ca
- To participate in the online survey of counsellors type the following into browser
- <https://edc.camhx.ca/redcap/surveys/?s=PJLF7C7TRP>