

Reduce the speed and ease of online gambling in order to prevent harm

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# Declarations

Philip Newall is a member of the Advisory Board for Safer Gambling – an advisory group of the Gambling Commission in Great Britain, and in 2020 was a special advisor to the House of Lords Select Committee Enquiry on the Social and Economic Impact of the Gambling Industry. In the last three years Philip Newall has contributed to research projects funded by the Academic Forum for the Study of Gambling, Clean Up Gambling, Gambling Research Australia, NSW Responsible Gambling Fund, and the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation. Philip Newall has received travel and accommodation funding from Alberta Gambling Research Institute, and received open access fee funding from Gambling Research Exchange Ontario.



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# Electronic gaming machines: are they the 'crack-cocaine' of gambling?

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# Only online gambling has a stronger association with harm



## A meta-analysis of problem gambling risk factors in the general adult population

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### ABSTRACT

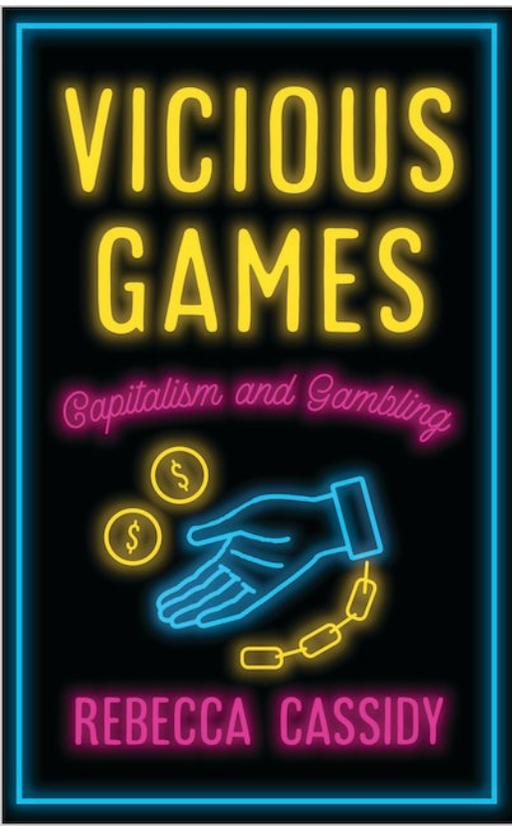
**Background and Aims** Few meta-analyses have been conducted to pool the most constant risk factors for problem gambling. The present meta-analysis summarizes effect sizes of the most frequently assessed problem gambling risk factors, ranks them according to effect size strength and identifies any differences in effects across gender.

**Method** A random-effects meta-analysis was conducted on jurisdiction-wide gambling prevalence surveys on the general adult population published until March 2019. One hundred and four studies were eligible for meta-analysis. The number of participants varied depending on the risk factor analyzed, and ranged from 5327 to 273 946 (52% female). Weighted mean odds ratios were calculated for 57 risk factors (socio-demographic, psychosocial, gambling activity and substance use correlates), allowing them to be ranked from largest to smallest with regard to their association with problem gambling.

**Results** The highest odds ratio (OR) was for internet gambling [OR = 7.59, 95% confidence interval (CI) = 5.24, 10.99,  $P < 0.000$ ] and the lowest was for employment status (OR = 1.03, 95% CI = 0.87, 1.22,  $P = 0.71$ ).

The online gambling market in Britain is the largest regulated online gambling market in the world

The annual gross gambling yield was £5.7 billion (in March 2020), which was 40% of the whole gambling market in Great Britain



“In the final decades of the twentieth century an attempt was made to transform gambling in the UK from an activity that was tolerated, to a business to be encouraged.”



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# The government's approach to harm prevention

In 2019 a £2 maximum bet was put on electronic gaming machines

One key proposed reform is a £2 - £5 maximum bet for online slots

Expenditure limits are a related proposed reform, and would involve gamblers providing proof of income to spend more than a given amount on gambling

“The government also recognises the **essential public health elements** to any discussion of gambling...”

Policy paper

## Review of the Gambling Act 2005 Terms of Reference and Call for Evidence

Published 8 December 2020

# What is a public health approach?

Rose (1985) gives the example of reducing the risk of heart disease

You could intervene heavily on those at highest risk, e.g. by providing heart transplants

But since heart disease risk lies on a continuum, you could reduce population risk more via smaller interventions (e.g., increasing physical activity) **among the whole population**

Rose (1985). Sick Individuals and Sick Populations.



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# Betting/expenditure limits are not a population strategy

People who experience harm at below the limit are not helped

And they do not even necessarily treat the highest-risk members of the population



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# Betting/expenditure limits are not a population strategy

People who can experience harm at below the limit are not helped

And they do not even necessarily treat the highest-risk members of the population

**In gaming, both participation and revenue were strongly skewed towards the most deprived areas.** Across gaming, the 20% most deprived areas provided 29.2% of players and 25.2% of operator GGY, whereas the 20% least deprived areas provided 12.9% of players and 15.0% of operator GGY. There was a strong tendency for gaming customers from more deprived areas to be more active than those in less deprived areas, though they also tended to play with a lower stake.

Forrest et al. (2022).  
Patterns of play.



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# Intervening on the speed and ease of online gambling

Is a population health strategy for online gambling

Modifies a product characteristic associated with harm

Can be enacted in multiple creative ways

Maintains the freedoms of those who are already gambling safely



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# What about the risk of backfiring?

Any intervention could “backfire” if it drives users towards riskier products, such as crypto-based gambling operators (Andrade et al., 2022)

In my view, this risk is greater for bet/expenditure limits than for speed limits

Gambling at below one’s preferred level of stakes is highly uninteresting

Speed/ease restrictions are a better way of making a given product safer, and then keeping gamblers on that product

# #1: The speed of online slots

In February 2021 the UK Gambling Commission announced the following changes to online slots

Minimum spin speed of 2.5 seconds

Banning autoplay

Patterns of Play data suggest 73% of slots players have at least one 15-minutes session with at least one spin every 2 seconds

But slower speeds of 5 seconds have been proposed and could be even better



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## #2: The speed of other online casino games

Including other online casino games increases the scope of the safety measure (and reduces risk of backfiring)

The lack of physical constraints means that casino games can be played faster online than is possible with traditional casino apparatus

For example, in-person roulette involves one spin every 60 seconds, whereas online roulette can have one spin every 10 seconds (mean ~ 21 seconds)



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## #2: The speed of other online casino games

**We recommend the equalisation of speed of play and spin, so that no game can be played quicker online than in a casino, betting shop or bingo hall.**

HOUSE OF LORDS

Select Committee on the Social and Economic  
Impact of the Gambling Industry

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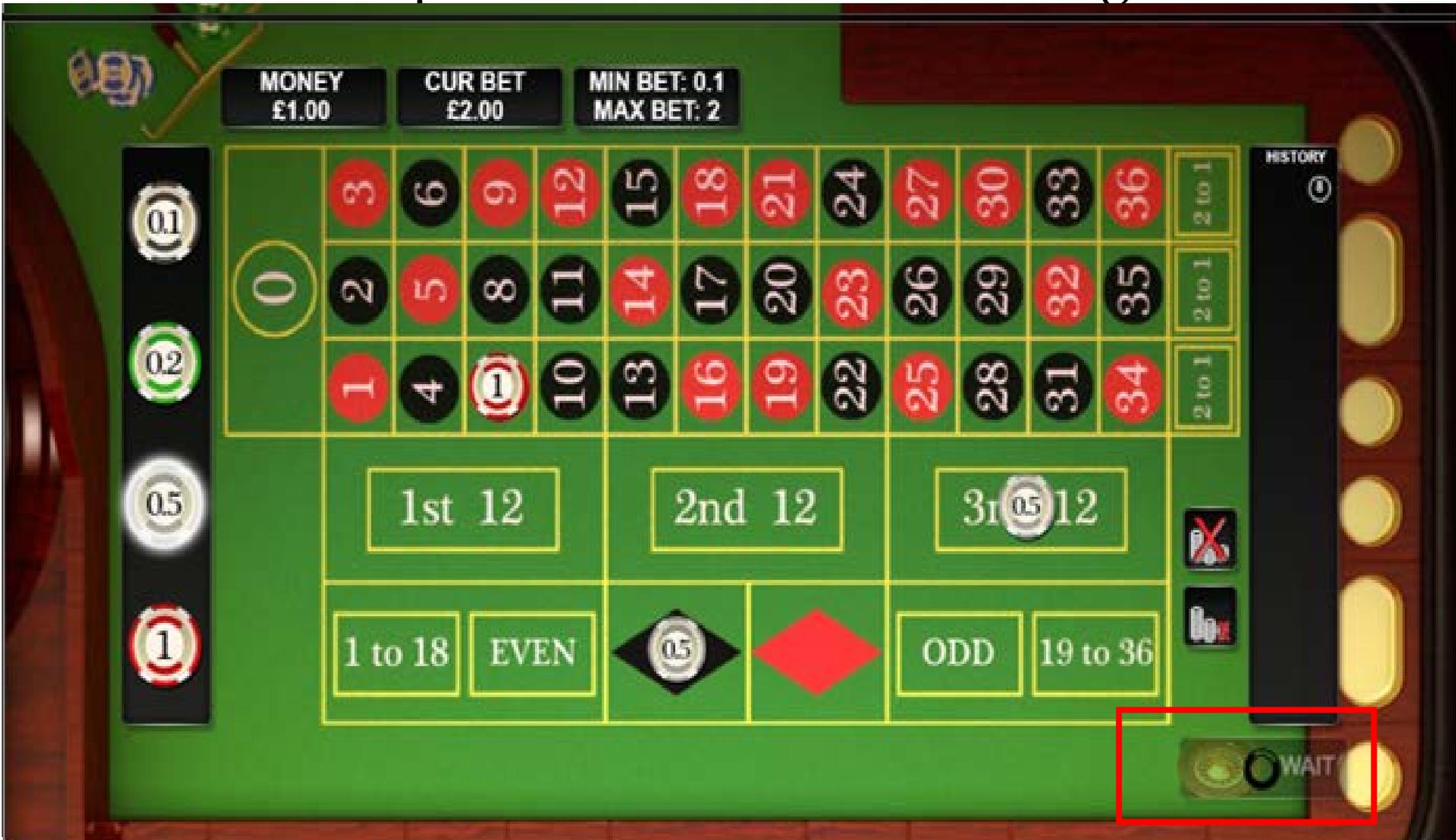
Report of Session 2019–21

**Gambling Harm—  
Time for Action**



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## #2: The speed of other online casino games



Newall et al. (2021). A speed-of-play limit reduces gambling expenditure in an online roulette game: Results of an online experiment



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## #2: The speed of other online casino games

We saw large reductions in the total number of spins played

Although bet sizes were on average slightly higher when spins were delayed, this effect did not cause the intervention to backfire, as there was an overall reduction in available funds bet

Provides evidence on how the Gambling Commission's changes to online slots could be expanded to further online casino products

### #3: The speed and ease of sports betting

Sports betting used to be low-frequency (e.g., weekly)

Globalisation of sports and new technology have made it possible to bet on sports at almost any time

In-play sports bets (made during an event) are the most strongly associated with harm

Newall et al. (2021). Structural characteristics of fixed-odds sports betting products



### #3: The speed and ease of sports betting

Australia has not banned in-play bets, but has made them available only via **telephone call**, and not directly via a smartphone app's interface

If I'm at the pub, it is very easy just to go put a live bet on the TAB machines...if your bet is losing...you're going to hedge your bet and put another one on. **But if I'm at home...I don't like calling up and putting a live bet on...by the time you call up and get through to someone...the market could close or the odds change or that extra minute you know, is enough to sort of discourage me. (11)**



Hing et al. (2022). Smartphone betting on sports, esports and daily fantasy sports amongst young adults.

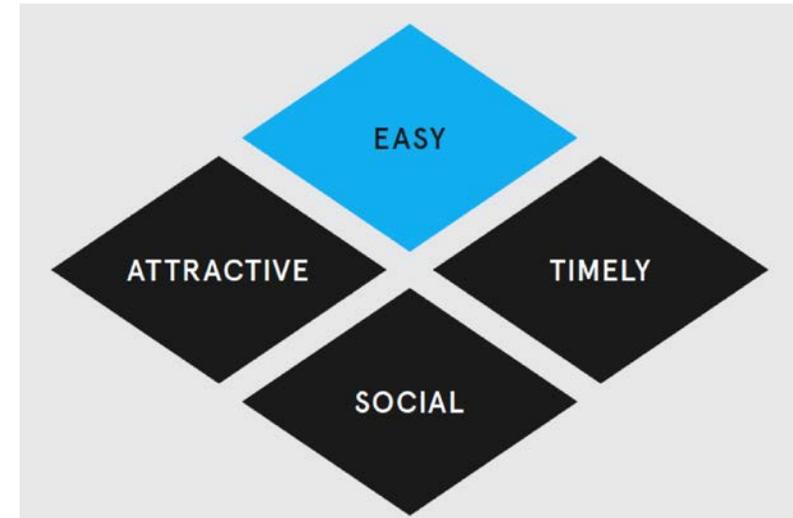
# #4: The ease of online gambling

Online gambling platforms are keen to make it easy to gamble

ADDICTION RESEARCH & THEORY  
2019, VOL. 27, NO. 2, 65–67  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/16066359.2018.1474206>

EDITORIAL

**Dark nudges in gambling**



KEY ISSUES IN  
PRODUCT-BASED HARM  
MINIMISATION

**Prepared for:** The Responsible Gambling Trust

**Authors:** Jonathan Parke, Adrian Parke, Alex Blaszczynski

**Behavioural Risk Audit of  
Gambling Operator Platforms**

Findings Report  
July 2022

THE  
BEHAVIOURAL  
INSIGHTS  
TEAM

THE  
GAMBLING  
POLICY &  
RESEARCH  
UNIT

## #4: The ease of online gambling

Reverse withdrawals (until they were banned by the Gambling Commission) delayed withdrawals by up to 72 hours, during which time gamblers could cancel a requested withdrawal and instantly resume gambling

This increased the ease (but not speed) of online gambling



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## #4: The ease of online gambling

What about “reverse deposits”?

Put a 72-hour delay on all deposits, during which time they can be cancelled

This does not prevent any gambling that is deliberative and planned-out



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# Conclusion: Reducing the speed and ease of online gambling

Is a population health strategy for online gambling

Modifies a product characteristic associated with harm

Can be enacted in multiple creative ways

Maintains the freedoms of those who are already gambling safely



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Thanks for your attention!

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EDITORIAL

ADDICTION

SSA

## Reduce the speed and ease of online gambling in order to prevent harm

*Online gambling is strongly associated with gambling harm. Harm prevention interventions that reduce the speed and ease of online gambling have advantages compared to more restrictive alternatives (such as stake or expenditure limits) because they can act on all gamblers and maintain the freedoms of those who are gambling safely.*

deliberative and planned out, which benefits those who are already gambling safely.

Aspects of this approach are not entirely novel to the UK. In 2021, the regulator acted on game speed in online slots by introducing a minimum spin time of 2.5 seconds, and by banning ‘autoplay’ features [11]. An analysis of operator data suggested that this intervention might benefit a majority of online slots players, as on average, 73% of players play at least one 15-minute session with at least one