

The impact of wide-open **sports**
online gambling and marketing on
helpline and treatment numbers.

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Conflicts of Interest

Conflict of interest The author declares that he has no conflict of interest. In the past three years he has received funding from the Canadian Institute for Health Research, Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, Gambling Research Exchange (GREO) and Ontario Lottery and Gaming (through GREO). In all cases, the contract included guarantees of independence and intellectual property rights for the researcher and the funders made no attempt to influence the study at any point. The author has also acted as a consultant on gambling problems for various government and legal entities, reviewed grant applications and articles for publication.

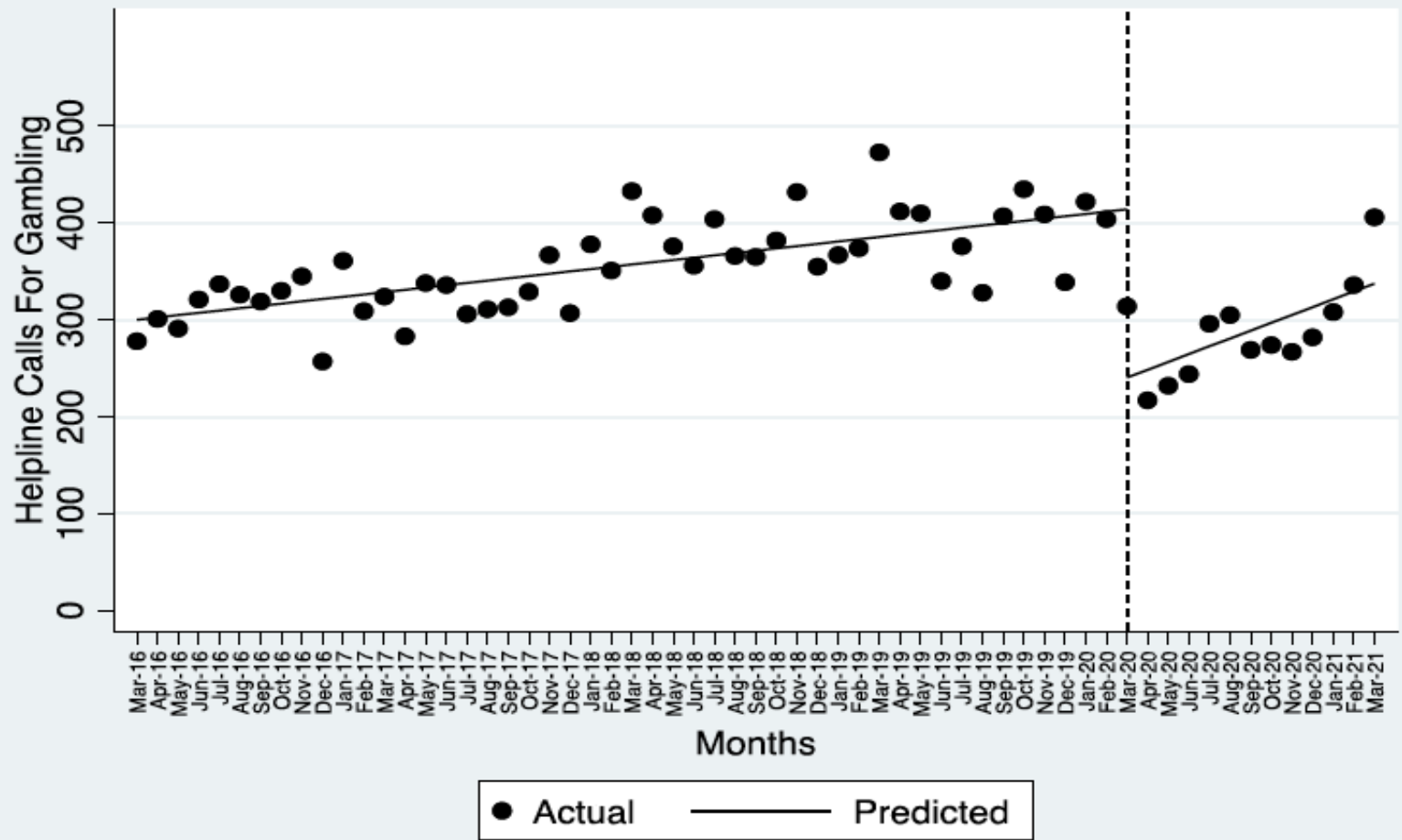
Background

- ❑ 2015 Ontario launches online gambling platform
- ❑ 2018 US legalized sports gambling.
- ❑ 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted traditional forms of gambling and accelerated the rise of online gambling
- ❑ April 2022, Ontario began licensing commercial companies to offer online gambling
- ❑ Heavy marketing of commercial sites online gambling

Effects on Gambling Due to COVID-19 pandemic

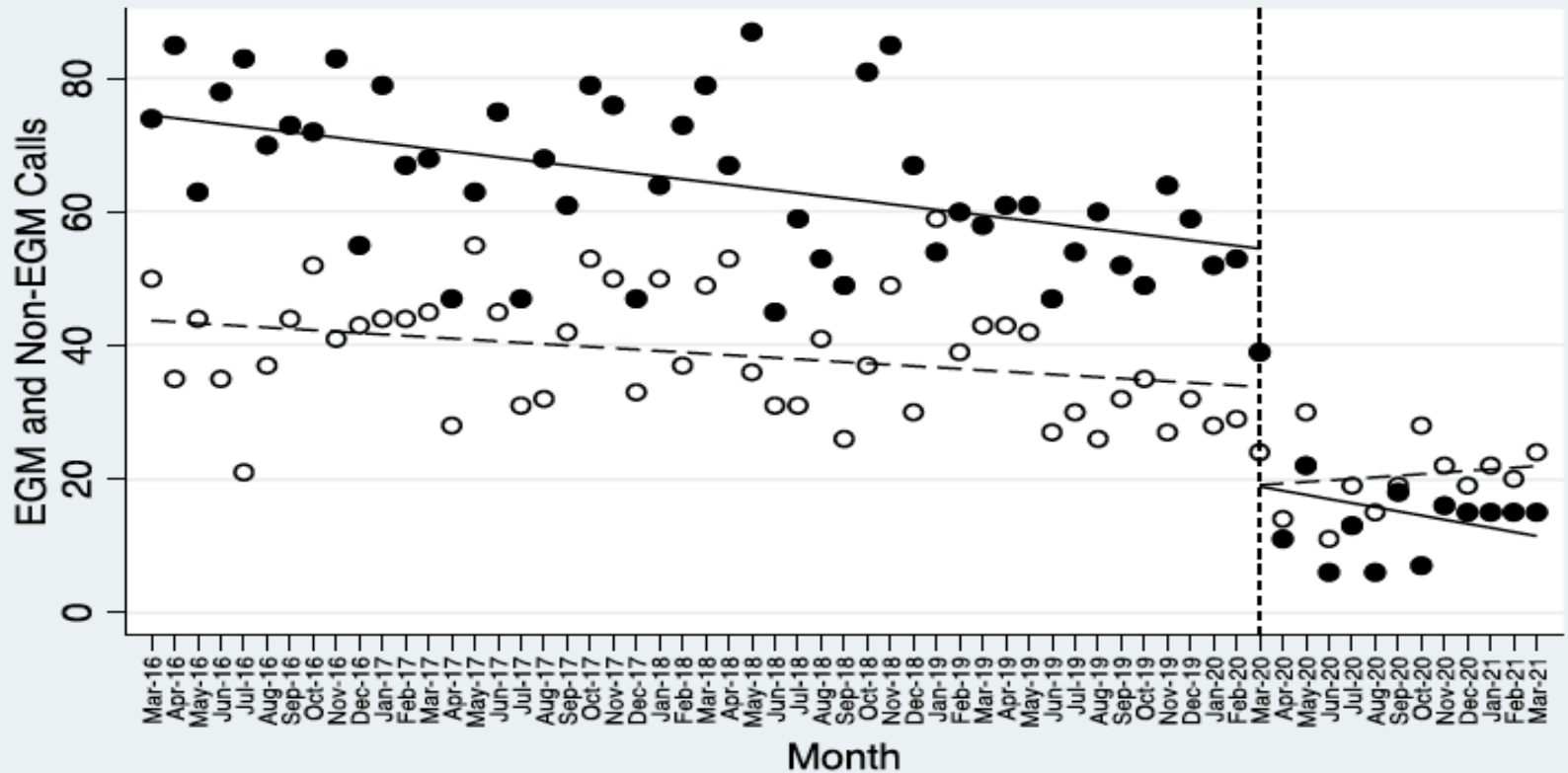
- Substantial economic effects society
- Traditional land-based gambling venues were closed.
- Online gambling platforms saw record profits.

Changes in Helpline Calls During the Pandemic



Prais-Winsten and Cochrane-Orcutt regression - lag(1)

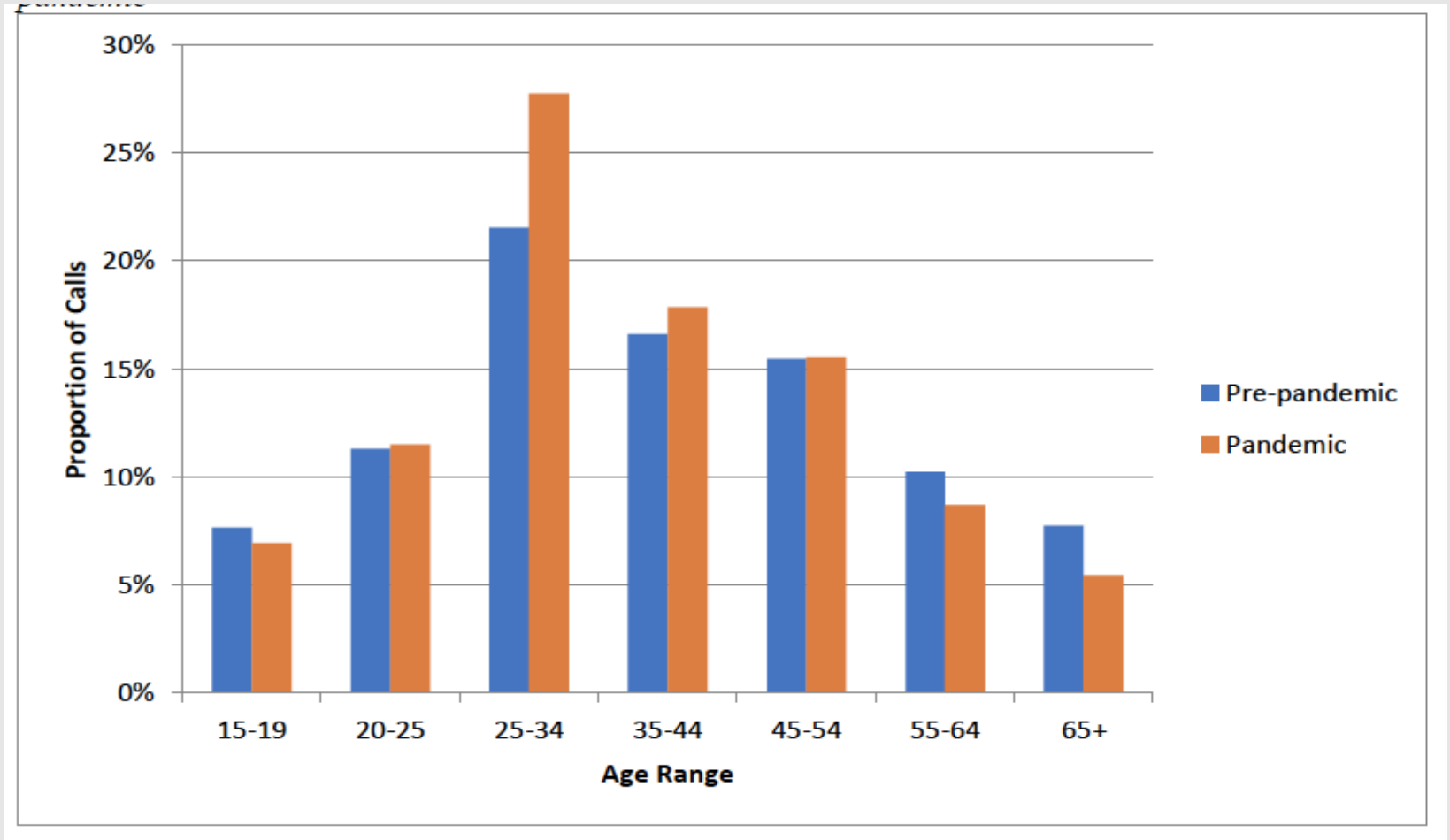
Shift away from EGMs during lockdowns



EGM calls	● Actual	— Predicted
Non-EGM calls	○ Actual	- - - Predicted

Prais-Winsten and Cochrane-Orcutt regression - lag(1)

Changes in age of Helpline Callers



Summary of COVID effect

- Closing casinos temporarily reduced helpline calls related to problem gambling
- Shift in calls away from EGMs
- Shift in age towards younger calls
- Relative increase in calls from males.

Rise to Online Gambling Platforms

- April 2022 Ontario began licensing commercial companies to offer online gambling
- Canada was swamped with heavy marketing of those commercial gambling sites
- For sites only available in Ontario
- The Ontario Helpline added online gambling as a category in June 2021

Online gambling: 2021 to 2023

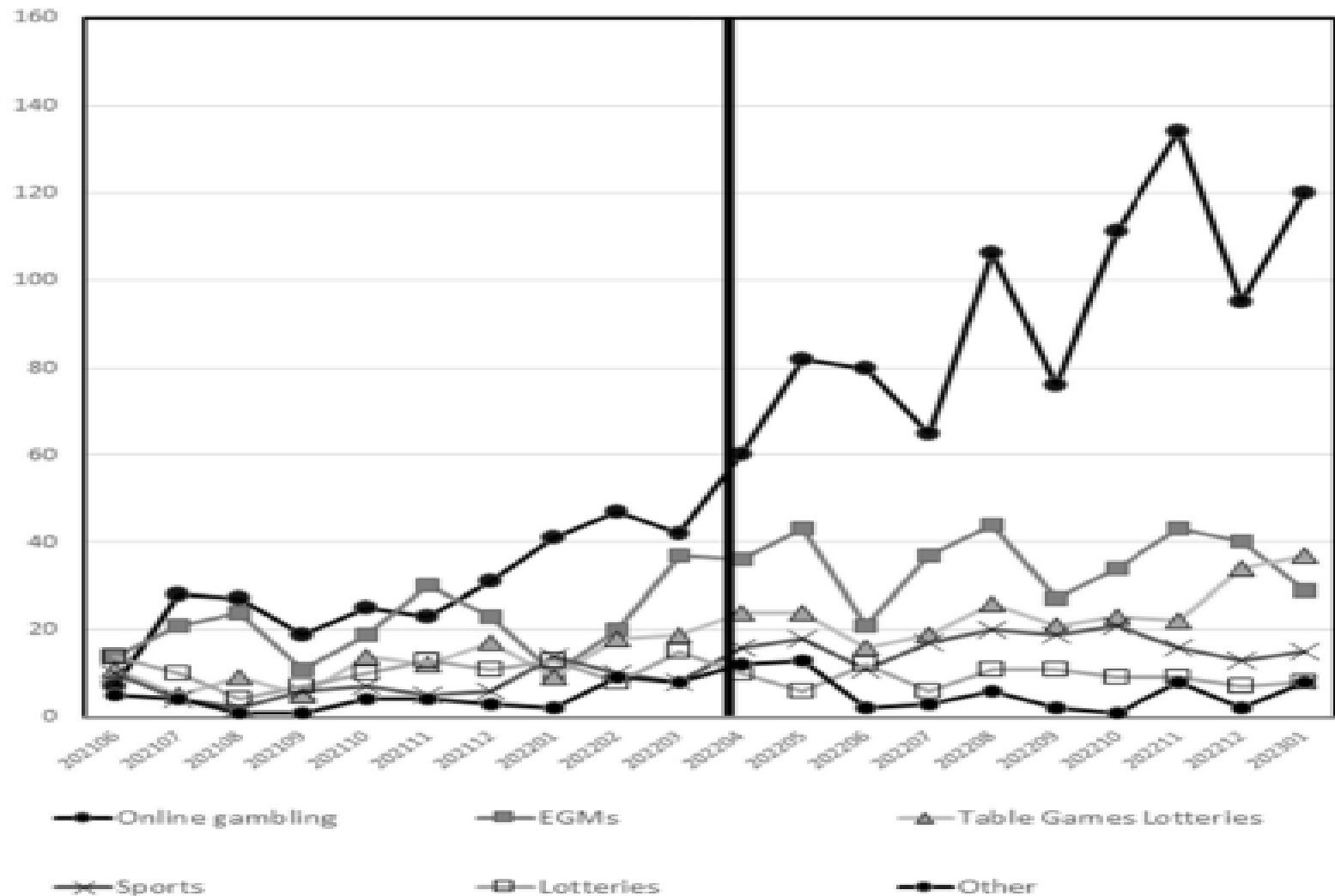
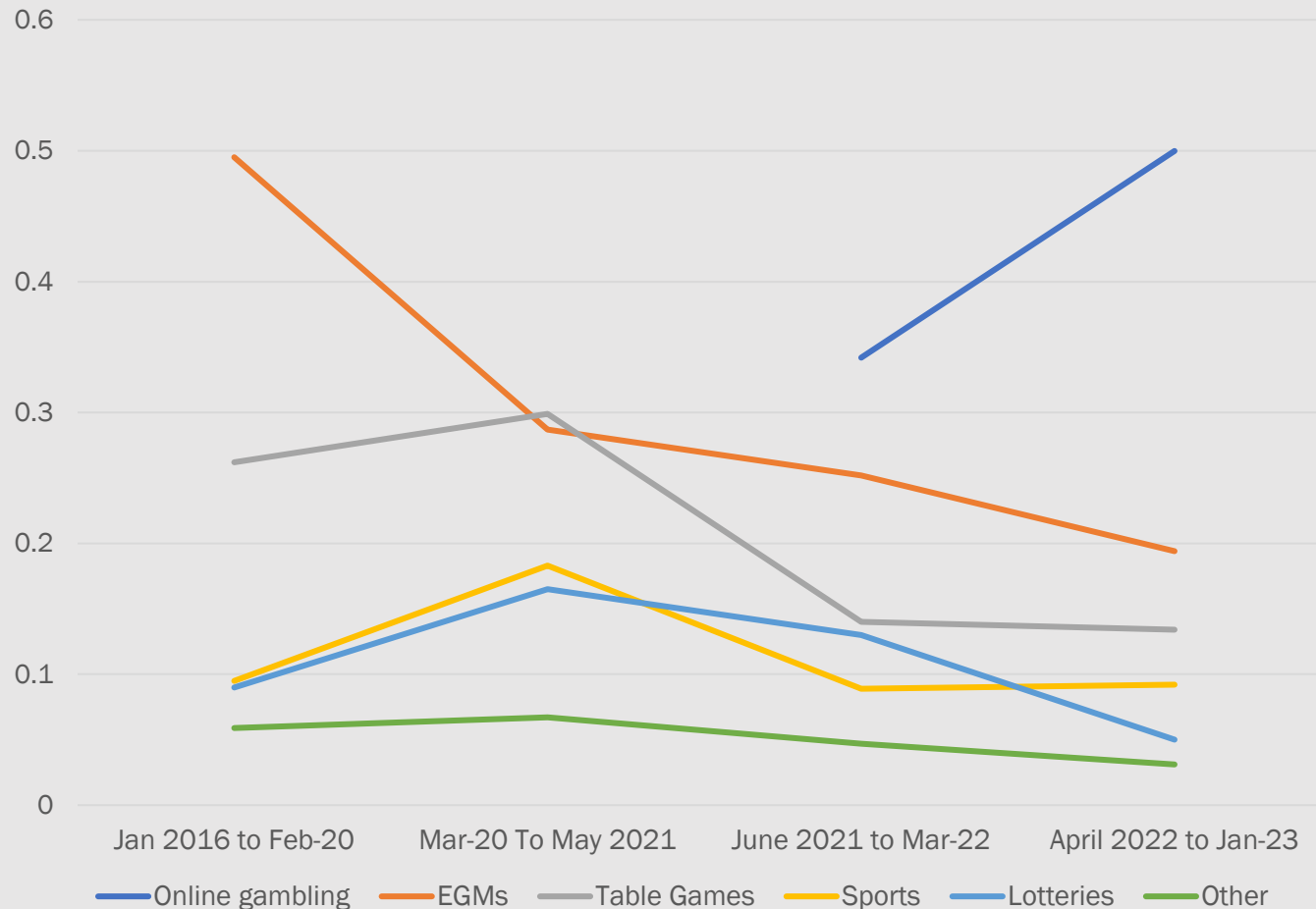
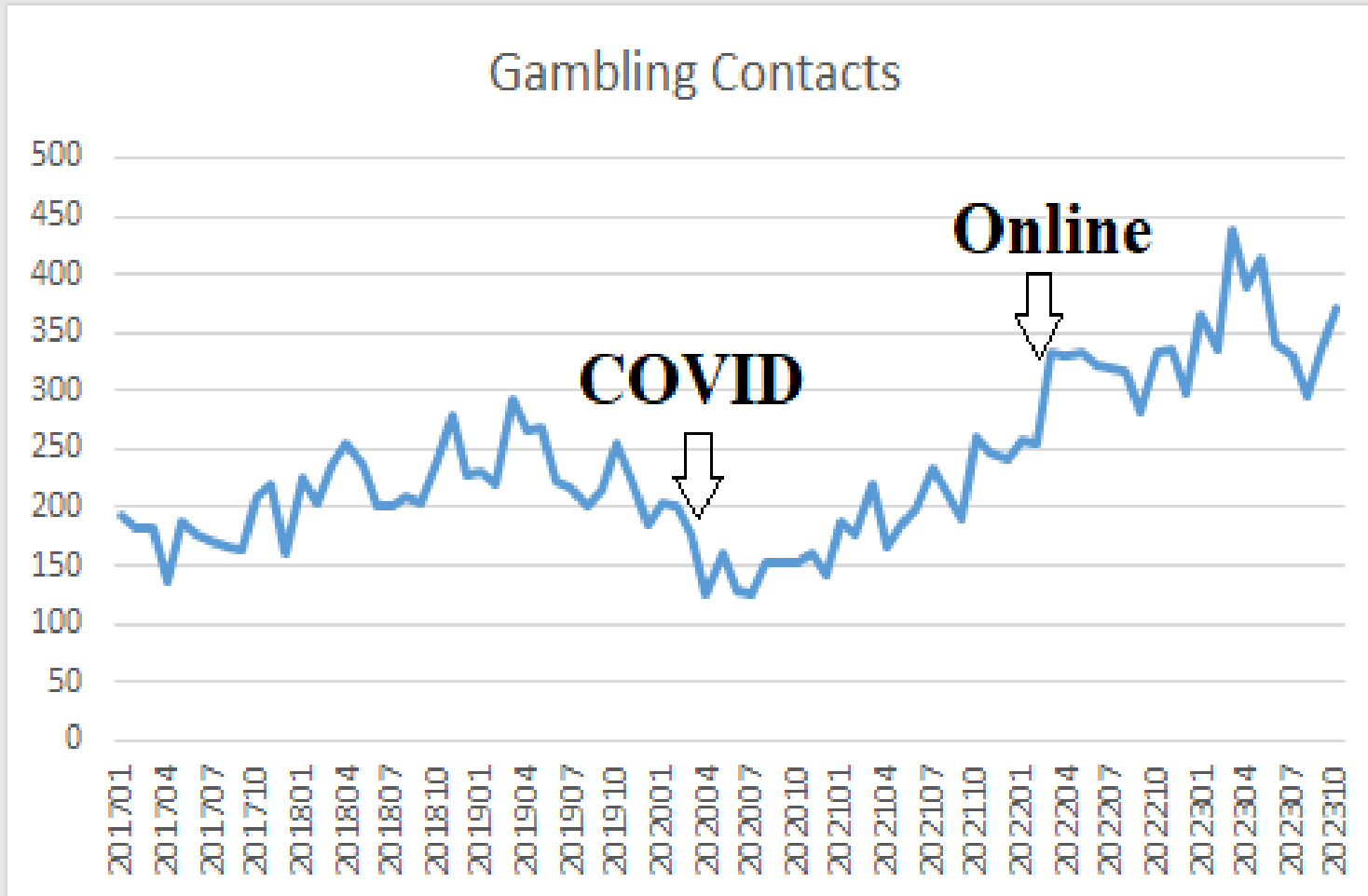


Fig. 1 Number of calls per game type from June 2021 to January 2023. The change in legislation is indicated by the solid vertical bar, April 2022

Percentage of calls by game type from 2016 to 2023



Total calls from 2017 to 2023



Demographics of people who call regarding online and all other games

	Online	Other
Gender		
Female	22.7%	27.6%
Male	74.3%	67.7%
Age		
16 to 34	56.5%	48.0%
35 to 44	22.3%	21.0%
45 and up	21.1%	31.0%

Type of game play online in Helpline data (from Dec. 2022)

Online Card Games	24.3%
Online Slots Games	38.3%
Online Sports	29.6%
Online Table Games	7.8%

Note: online game type was only specified in 75% of calls.

Revenue?

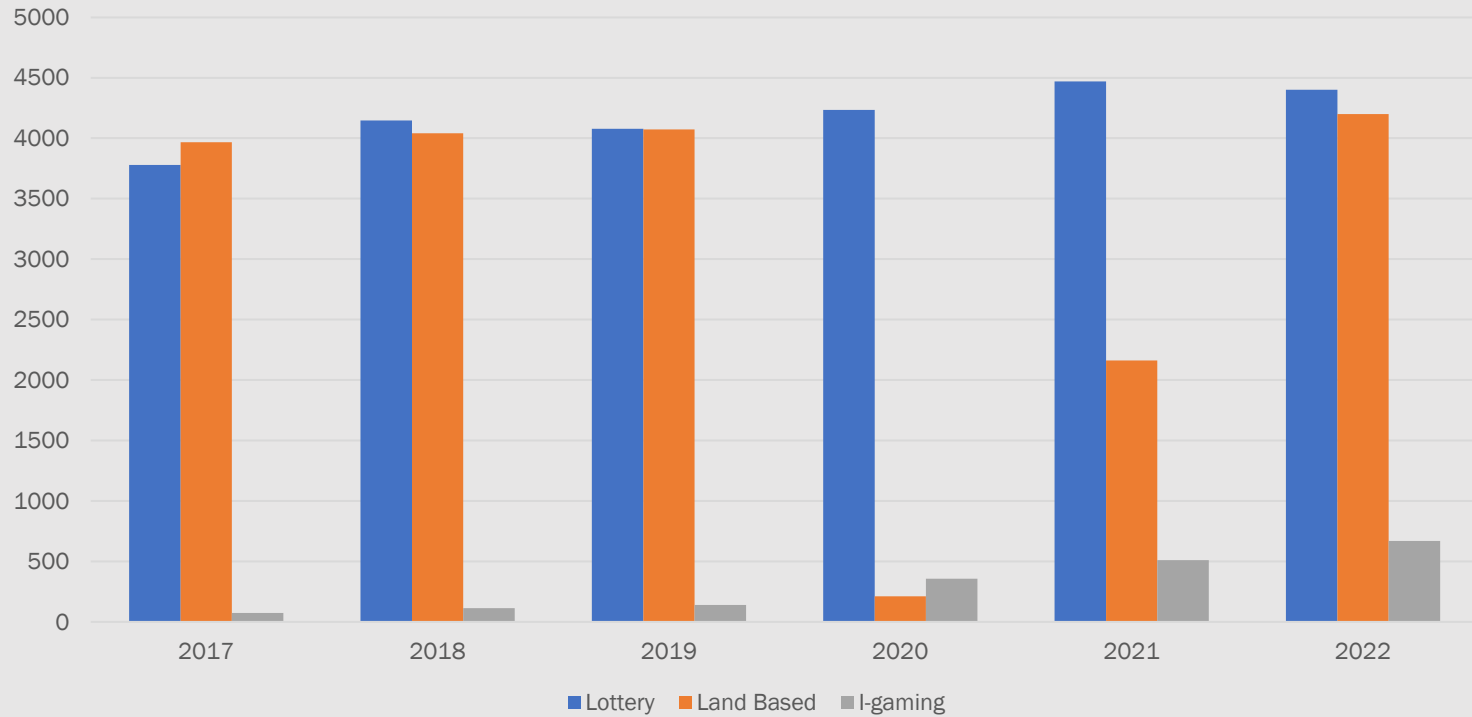
Revenue:

OLG from 2019 and 2022

	2019	2022
Lottery	4078M	4400M
Land Based	3871M	4200M
I-gaming	139M	669M

Note: proceeds, not net.

Revenue by type of gambling (in millions) from OLG



Since the launch of an open, regulated market in Ontario

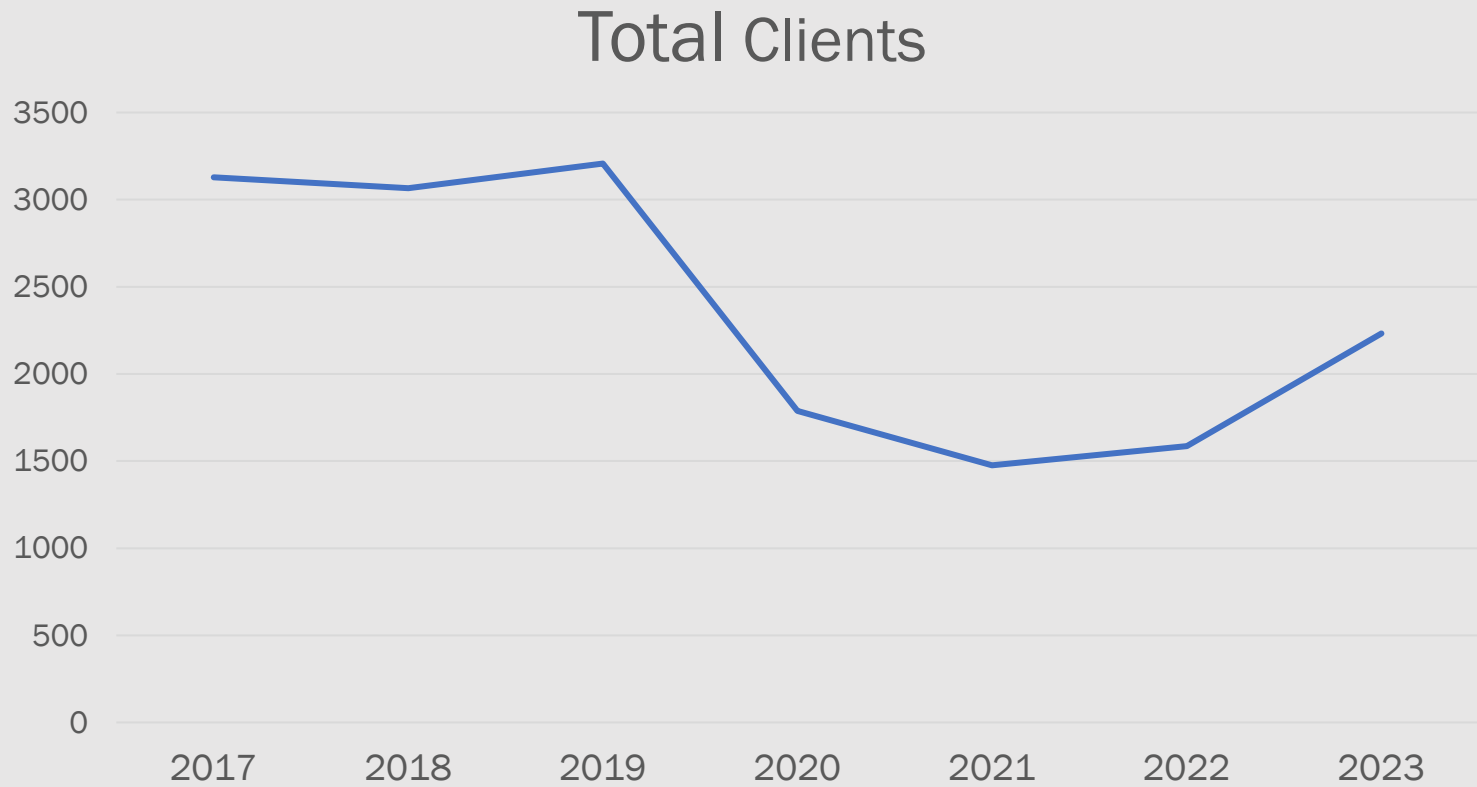
	Wagers	Revenue
Total	35,600	1,400M
Casino	27,600	940M
Sports	7,000	433M
Poker	992	40M

Data released July 19, 2023

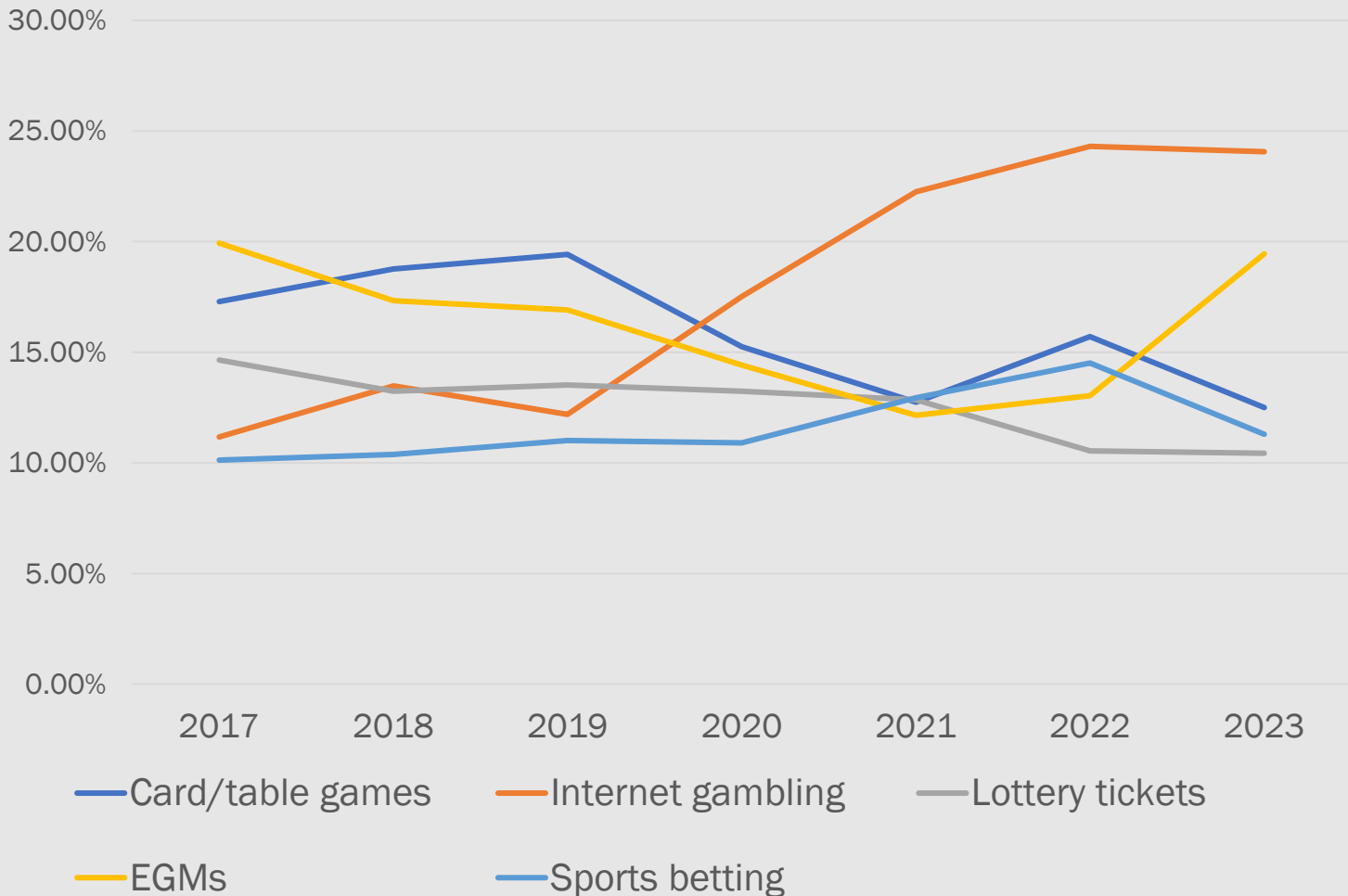
Note this is in addition to the OLG online data reported in previous slide

What about Treatment?

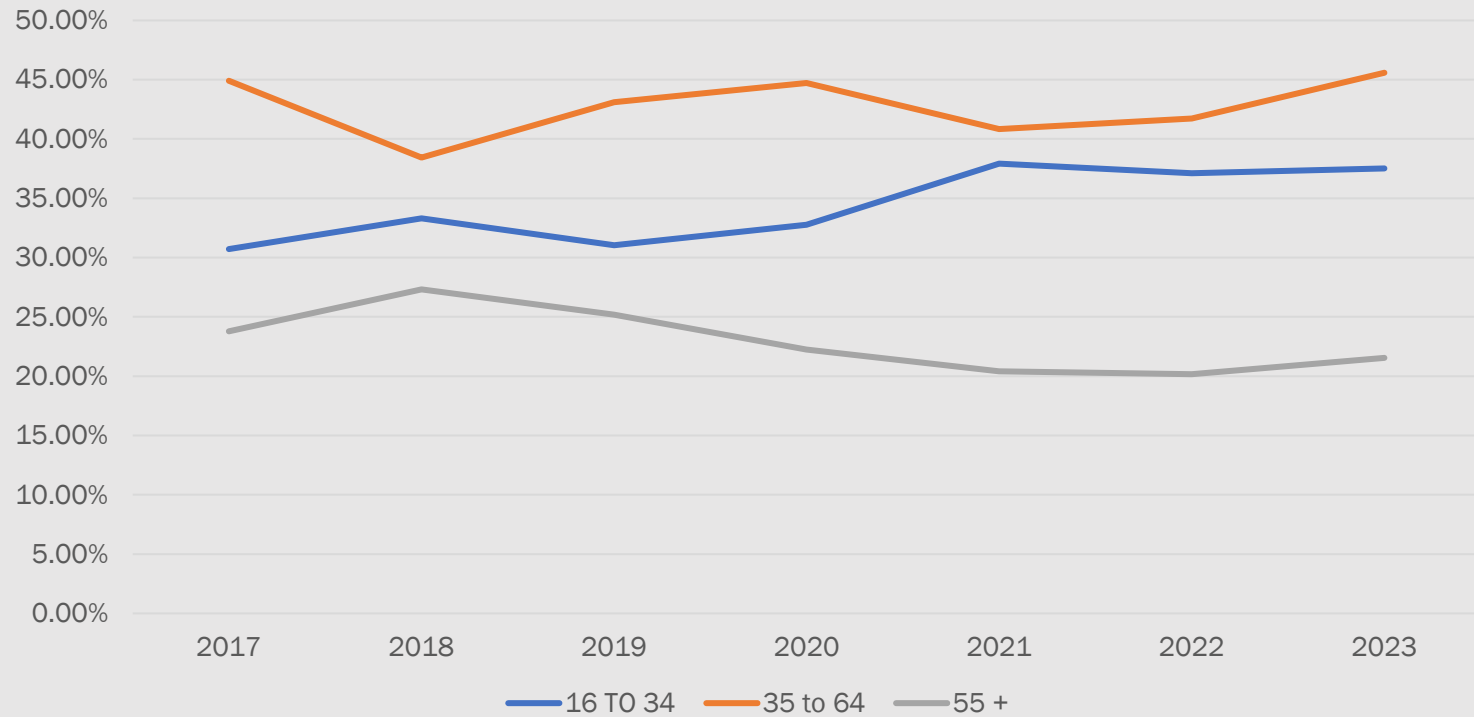
Treatment Numbers.



Shifts in games played by treatment samples



Changes in age of treatment sample



Conclusion

- The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted gambling behaviors and accelerated the growth of online gambling markets
- Expanded legal online gambling opportunities increased in helpline calls related to internet related gambling problems
- A shift away from EGMs toward online gambling in Helpline calls and in the treatment-population began in 2020 and accelerated in 2022.
- Younger adults increased relative to other age groups
- Similar shifts found in treatment settings.

Should we be concerned?

- Often a lag between occurrence of a crisis related to gambling and treatment admission
 - *People might run out of money several times before admitting that they need help*
 - *Treatment is often a last resort*
- Greater availability of online vs offline gambling (24/7 from home)
- Previous studies have shown a higher prevalence of problems among online gamblers
- Lower rates of treatment attendance among younger gamblers and male gamblers
- On the other hand, there is a greater potential for monitoring of problems and intervention (if industry wanted to).

More observations

- More helpline calls for online gambling have not resulted in larger numbers of clients in treatment
 - *not YET anyway.*
- Treatment numbers in 2023 were still lower than pre-covid levels, but increasing.
- But Hao et al., (2024) reports only 24% of PG treatment centres were fully operational in 2022.
 - *Possibly lower treatment numbers due to a lack of treatment services.*
- ~~Revenue from online gambling so far (2022) is a relatively small (7%) part of total gambling revenue.~~
 - *Eagerly awaiting the 2023 annual report*
- No need to panic about online gambling (*yet*).

Future Directions

- Ongoing monitoring and evaluation of gambling trends is needed to inform public health.
- Public health interventions are needed to address emerging issues like online gambling problems
- Further research should explore how gambling behaviors may evolve in this post-pandemic environment
- Does the limited capacity of treatment services explain the discrepancy between helpline and treatment numbers?
- Or, are helpline callers seeking help in some other way: Self exclusion? Mutual self help (GA)? Online help?
- Need to reach out to younger people who may be reluctant to seek traditional therapy

Resources

- Turner, N. E., Cook, S., & van der Maas, M. (2022). The impact of COVID-19 on gambling-related crisis calls in Ontario, Canada: an interrupted time series analysis. *Journal of Gambling Issues*, 50. 185-202. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4309/SXJY8166>
- Turner, N.E. Sinclair, L., Matheson, F.I., (2023 in press) Brief Report: The Rise of Online Betting in Ontario. *Journal of Gambling Studies*. Online. DOI: 10.1007/s10899-023-10268-1
- Hao, S., McLuhan, A., Moloney, G., Kaur, N., Moineddin, R., Turner, N. E., & Matheson, F. I. (2024). Operational status of mental health, substance use, and problem gambling services: A system-level snapshot two years into the COVID-19 pandemic. *The International Journal of Health Planning and Management*.
- Ontario Lottery and Gaming Annual reports from 2019 and 2022
- Global news <https://t.co/EuPSIP7Rd0>
- DATIS <https://confluence.camh.ca/display/CKB/DATIS+Mandatory+Data+Set+-+Data+Dictionary>
- Ontario Problem Gambling Helpline [Connexontario.ca](https://www.connexontario.ca)