

SURVIVING NOT LIVING

A qualitative exploration of the experiences of people who suffer crime and gambling-related harms

University of Lincoln research has:

- Undertaken in-depth qualitative interviews with 22 people who experienced crime and gambling-related harms, as part of a programme of research organised and funded by The Commission on Crime & Gambling-related Harms.
- The research identified a wide range of challenges relating to a lack of awareness and support across all stages of the criminal justice system.
- The research has been presented nationally and internationally with the aim of improving awareness and support. The findings were included in a final report launched by The Commission on Crime and Gambling-related Harms in the House of Lords in April 2023



So, it's probably two to three years where I was just using credit or loans, it's difficult, you always say you were going to try and win the money to pay off all your debts, but even when I won, I didn't pay the debts off, I gambled it. I was in such dire straits financially, my job meant that I had access to funds, and one day I substituted my bank details for works details and stole money for the first time.



Commission on Crime & Gambling Related Harms

- 54% of the adult population in England engage in gambling
- 0.5% of the general population are considered to experience 'problem gambling'. In criminal justice populations, this is higher (around 14% amongst people in prison)
- Gambling harms include negative impacts on relationships, mental and physical health, employment.
(Public Health England, 2023; Smith et al., 2022)

Using qualitative interviews, the researcher, Dr Lauren Smith, explored the experiences of people who had experienced crime and gambling-related harms. Eighteen participants who took part were people who had committed crime as a result of gambling; four participants were family members of people who committed crime as a result of gambling. The research sought to understand:

- Early engagement in gambling and escalation into crime
- Experiences of the criminal justice system
- The impact of crime and gambling on areas such as health, employment and family relationships
- The perspective of people who have experienced crime and gambling-related harms about what needs to happen to aid prevention and facilitate better support for people impacted.

MAIN FINDINGS

Pathways into gambling and subsequent crime were diverse, frequently including normalisation of gambling at an early age, but peer influence, transitions to university, significant life events, and large, early wins also factored. A paucity of awareness, knowledge, understanding, assessment and support across all stages of the criminal justice system from police through courts, prisons and probation was reported. Among legal defence teams, there were isolated instances of increased understanding but overall widespread reporting of a lack of knowledge which was viewed as a missed opportunity to identify gambling as a mitigating factor in court. Many people who committed crime as a result of gambling spent lengthy periods of time released under investigation or on bail, awaiting their court hearings. This resulted in a liminality which hindered progress towards recovery for many. A lack of screening, assessment and suitable support pathways in prisons was further exacerbated by reported widespread gambling activities inside prisons, often facilitated by staff. Once engaged in probation supervision, again the limited awareness of gambling and clear referral pathways was a concerning factor in ongoing recovery. Finally, many people experienced Proceeds of Crime Act proceedings which had a disproportionate impact on families, and remained a longer term stressor for people due to the financial implications of high cost confiscation orders.

FUTURE NEEDS

The following recommendations were included in the final report:

- Systematic screening and assessment for gambling-harms should be made available in police custody suites, in prisons and within probation services.
- Support should be made available for people directly impacted, and their families, via accessible referral pathways at multiple junctures within throughout the criminal justice system.
- Assessment and support needs to be implemented within a context of increased awareness amongst staff about gambling and crime-related harms, and measures to reduce gambling in prisons should be introduced.
- Gambling harms should be considered a mitigating factor in sentencing outcomes, and the use of POCA in gambling-related cases should be reviewed.

IMPACT ON POLICY

The research has been presented to the following:

- The Howard League for Penal Reform Conference 2022
- The Commission on Crime and Gambling-related Harms
- The Gambling Commission
- HM Prison and Probation Service, via their annual 'Insights' festival
- The British Society for Criminology Conference 2022
- Wales Probation Service

The research has informed the development of a whole prison approach to addressing crime and gambling-related harms within a Midlands prison, and has increased awareness and screening amongst probation staff across Wales. Following publication of the findings, the Commission name changed from the Commission on Crime & Problem Gambling' to its current name, the 'Commission on Crime & Gambling-related Harms'. The research formed a large part of the evidence base for the Commission's final report which was launched in the House of Lords in April 2023. The research report, summary and timelines for participants can be accessed [here](#) and the Commission's final report can be found [here](#).

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