



Spillemyndigheden

# Gambling Problems in Denmark 2021

Summary of survey of gambling and gambling  
problems in Denmark

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# Summary

In November 2017, a political agreement was entered into with the aim of strengthening the fight against gambling addiction in Denmark.

It was also decided that surveys of the prevalence of gambling problems and gambling behaviour in Denmark would be conducted every five years. This would ensure continued documentation of the impact of the measures to prevent compulsive gambling. The intention was also to monitor gambling trends for the purpose of formulating new measures to prevent more gamblers from developing gambling problems.

On behalf of the Danish Gambling Authority, Rambøll Management Consulting conducted a survey of the prevalence of gambling problems in Denmark in 2021.

The survey includes investigation of:

- The prevalence of gambling problems among adults, and among children and young people
- The relationship between video gaming and gambling
- The effect of advertising and commercials on gambling behaviour

This summary presents the results of the survey and aims to provide an overview of the prevalence survey. The main report can be accessed on the Danish Gambling Authority's website: [www.spillemyndigheden.dk](http://www.spillemyndigheden.dk).

# Survey method

## National survey

A national questionnaire survey was conducted to investigate the prevalence of gambling problems. The questionnaire was sent to 10,000 randomly selected adults (18-79-year-olds) and to 5,000 randomly selected children and young people (12-17-year-olds). The overall response rate for the entire survey was almost 38 %.

To reveal the extent of gambling problems, the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI) screening tool was used. The tool consists of nine questions with four response categories with associated scores. Based on the overall score, the respondents are divided into four categories, ranging from no gambling problems to serious gambling problems.

## Qualitative interviews

Qualitative interviews were conducted to further nuance the results of the national survey. A total of 20 adults (18–79-year-olds) and 10 children and young people (12-17-year-olds) were recruited for interviews based on their responses to the survey or via Center for Ludomani (the Danish Centre for Problem Gambling). The focus of the recruitment was to contact people with moderate or serious gambling problems and people who are gamers.

## Survey experiments

Survey experiments were conducted involving 1,510 adults (18–79-year-olds) to investigate how gambling ads and commercials affect the propensity to gamble. On selecting participants, people who gambled at least once a month were over-sampled, so as to account for around half the participants.

## Laboratory tests

To investigate how the body reacts to gambling ads and commercials, laboratory tests were performed to measure variation in heart rate, sweat production in the palms of the hands, and eyetracking. The tests included 29 people whose gambling and degree of gambling problems varied.







# Prevalence of gambling problems

The total proportion of adults (over the age of 18) who have gambling problems to varying degrees has doubled in five years – from 5.2 % (around 212,000 people) in 2016, to 10.9 % (around 478,000 people) in 2021.

Among children and young people (12–17-year-olds), 6 % (around 24,500 people) have gambling problems to varying degrees, even though it is not legal for this age group to engage in most types of gambling.



## Prevalence of gambling problems Adults

### Low level of gambling problems, PGSI 1-2

The proportion of adults with a low level of gambling problems increased from 3.6 % to 6.5 % (around 287,000 people) in the period from 2016 to 2021. This is an increase of 80 %.

### Moderate gambling problems, PGSI 3-7

The proportion of adults with moderate gambling problems increased from 1.2 % to 3.7 % (around 161,100 people) in the period from 2016 to 2021. This is an increase of 200 %.

### Serious gambling problems, PGSI 8+

The proportion of adults with serious gambling problems in 2021 was 0.7 % (around 29,500 people). In 2016, the proportion was 0.4 %. The difference is not statistically significant, which means that it cannot be concluded that the number of people with serious gambling problems has increased.



## Prevalence of gambling problems Children and young people

### Low level of gambling problems, PGSI 1-2

Around 3.3 % of children and young people (around 13,500 people) have a low level of gambling problems. The proportion is lower than for adults.

### Moderate gambling problems, PGSI 3-7

Around 2.0 % of children and young people (around 8,200 people) have moderate gambling problems. The proportion is lower than for adults.

### Serious gambling problems, PGSI 8+

Around 0.6 % of children and young people (around 2,600 people) have serious gambling problems. This is the same proportion as among adults. The difference between children and young people with serious gambling problems compared to adults with serious gambling problems is not statistically significant.

# Gambling addiction in the Nordic region

In the Nordic countries, the gambling market has been liberalised to varying degrees. While the Danish gambling market was liberalised back in 2012, the Swedish market was not liberalised until 2019, and in Norway there is still a state monopoly on the provision of gambling.

The prevalence of gambling problems in the Nordic countries also varies. Compared to Denmark, there is a significantly higher incidence of people with gambling problems in Norway; while in Sweden, on the other hand, there is a significantly lower incidence of people with gambling problems.

Denmark 2021				
Low level problems	Moderate problems	Serious problems	total	
6.5 %	3.7 %	0.7 %	10.9 %	
Sweden 2021				
Low level problems	Moderate problems	Serious problems	total	
3.0 %*	0.8 %*	0.5 %	4.3 %*	
Norway 2019				
Low level problems	Moderate problems	Serious problems	total	
8.8 %*	3.1 %	1.4 %*	13.3 %	*

\* Statistically significant differences between Denmark and Sweden and Norway, respectively.

Note: The comparison between the Nordic countries is subject to certain reservations. The timing of the survey in Norway differs from Denmark and Sweden. Furthermore, the respective surveys were not conducted with completely identical target groups, and the countries also differ in terms of the data collection methods used.



# Who has gambling problems?

People with moderate or serious gambling problems have a number of special characteristics. The study is adjusted for demographic and socioeconomic conditions.



## Gambling problems Adults

### Men

Adults with gambling problems are typically younger men aged 18-39 who are employed. The group has high weekly alcohol consumption, as well as experiencing poor physical health.

### Age at onset

The majority start gambling when they are between 9-17 years of age (41 %) or 18-24 years of age (42 %).

The same applies to adults without gambling problems.

### Type of gambling at onset

The majority start with physical or online betting.

For adults without gambling problems, lotteries/scratch cards purchased from a physical retailer are most common.

### Induction

Gambling has typically been introduced by a friend. They are more likely to have a social circle who gamble compared to adults without gambling problems.



## Gambling problems Children and young people

### Boys

No other factors have been identified that have a separate bearing on the propensity for gambling problems.

### Age at onset

The majority start gambling when they are between 9-14 years of age.

The same applies to children and young people without gambling problems.

### Type of gambling at onset

The majority start with online betting.

For children and young people without gambling problems, lotteries/scratch cards purchased from a physical retailer are most common.

### Induction

Gambling has typically been introduced by a friend. They are more likely to have a social circle who gamble compared to children and young people without gambling problems.

## Gambling behaviour of people with gambling problems

Gambling behaviour of people with gambling problems	Adults	Children and young people
Preferred types of gambling	Online betting and online casino	Online betting and online casino
Type of activity	Typically gamble alone. The same applies to adults without gambling problems.	More often gamble in pubs/restaurants compared to children and young people without gambling problems.
Time and money	Compared to adults without gambling problems, adults with gambling problems spend more time and money on gambling.	Compared to children and young people without gambling problems, children and young people with gambling problems spend more time and money on gambling.



# What can lead to problematic gambling behaviour?

Problematic gambling typically evolves over time. Many different circumstances in the individual's life can cause gambling to increase in extent and intensity.

## Sense of oneself as an expert

Over time, a sense of oneself is developed that the outcome of the gambling can be controlled. The reasoning is that it is possible to win on the basis of knowledge and skill, not luck. Gambling seems less risky. People start to gamble more, and with bigger stakes.

**” After I got to know the machine, I really thought I could figure out when it would pay off. I mean, when I should put in more money. This made me start to spend a lot more money.”**

Male, aged 39 (citation from the survey)

## Difficult conditions in everyday life

Relates to emotional life and everyday life, for example loneliness, stress, and conflicts in personal relationships. People turn to gambling when they need 'a sanctuary' or 'to forget' difficult emotions. It becomes a strategy to deal with challenges in life.

**” When I'm lonely, feeling down or stressed, gaming is a good escape from reality. You forget the 300 unread emails in your inbox. Gaming becomes my 'sanctuary' and a way for me to feel positive emotions.”**

Male, aged 58 (citation from the survey)

## Change in reasoning

Where gambling is initially associated with entertainment etc., it develops into a shortcut to a 'happy' and 'financially independent' life. People get caught in a vicious circle where gambling becomes a method of trying to win back lost money.

**”I felt that I had to gamble. Just imagine if I won. That would change everything. Then I'd be able to get through the month and maybe even save my financial situation.”**

Male, aged 39 (citation from the survey)

# The effect of advertising and commercials

It has not been possible to draw any clear conclusions about whether gambling ads and commercials affect people's appetite for gambling.

No association was found between ads and commercials, and gambling in survey experiments or laboratory tests. Conversely, the qualitative interviews gave indications that ads and commercials contribute to unplanned gambling and reinforce the appetite for gambling of people with moderate and serious gambling problems.

Citations from the survey:

**” I wouldn't say that commercials have a direct impact. But there are some commercials that naturally drew my attention. For example, if a commercial mentions a welcome bonus, you'll go for that type of gambling. So of course they tempt you.”**

Male, aged 20, serious gambling problems.

**” I've never thought about whether commercials affect me. But when a commercial pops up with the odds for a match, I've put some money in, even though I'd thought beforehand that I wouldn't bet on that match.”**

Male, aged 25, moderate gambling problems.

**“Some of the people in the commercials are normal people who've won, which really tempts me.”**

Male, aged 49, serious gambling problems.



# Gaming and gambling

There are a number of indications of a connection between high video gaming activity and gambling problems. However, it is not possible to conclude whether video gaming as such leads to gambling problems.

## Who and how many are gamers?

67 % of children and young people (12–17-year-olds) are gamers. Video gaming is most prevalent among boys. 91 % of boys are gamers, and 41 % of girls.

Boys spend more time on video gaming than girls, and more boys also experience spending too much time on gaming.

## The relationship between gaming and gambling

Gaming and gambling typically constitute two different activities, one of which is related to gambling for money, while the other is a collective term for different computer- and console-based games (gaming).

A large proportion of the computer games played today include opportunities to buy virtual elements that can be linked to gambling. The gambling elements primarily concern 'loot boxes' and 'skins'.



## Skins

53 % of boys who are gamers have bought and/or sold skins, while this only applies to 19 % of the girls who are gamers. 10 % of boys who have used skins have done so in connection with gambling, while this applies to only 1 % of girls who have used skins.



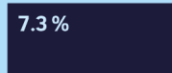
## Loot boxes

33 % of children and young people who are gamers have bought loot boxes. For the boys, this is 43 %, while for the girls it is 10 %. 72 % of children and young people who have bought loot boxes have spent less than DKK 50 on this during the past month.

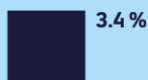
Gambling problems are significantly greater for children and young people who are gamers than for children and young people who are not gamers.

### Gambling problems among children and young people who:

#### Game



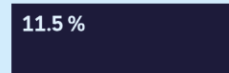
#### Do not game



Significant correlation between gambling problems and the use of skins among children and young people.

### Gambling problems among children and young people who are gamers and:

#### Use skins



#### Do not use skins



Significant correlation between gambling problems and the use of loot boxes among children and young people.

### Gambling problems among children and young people who are gamers and:

#### Buy loot boxes



#### Do not buy loot boxes







