

GAMSTOP

Evaluation report



1 Executive Summary

Introduction

GAMSTOP, previously trading as the National Online Self Exclusion Scheme, was established in 2016 by the Remote Gambling Association, in response to increased use of online gambling within the UK. GAMSTOP provides a single free portal that allows people to self-exclude from online gambling for a specified period (either six-months, one year or five years). As of 2019, the scheme has full coverage of all licenced gambling operators in the UK, providing full exclusion across all forms of online gambling. In addition, customers registered with GAMSTOP will not receive direct marketing from any gambling site with whom they are registered.

Methodology

This evaluation applied a mixed methods approach which included the delivery of a survey and qualitative in-depth interviews conducted with GAMSTOP users. The survey of GAMSTOP users was provided to approximately 175,000 GAMSTOP users who consented to take part in research. The survey achieved a total sample size of $n = 4,651$. The evaluation undertook a total of $n = 40$ qualitative depth interviews with service users to enrich the survey findings with the lived experience of GAMSTOP users. To assess the impact of GAMSTOP, the evaluation took a theory-based approach, deploying Contribution Analysis.

Key findings

1.1 User experience of GAMSTOP

Our evaluation found that satisfaction with GAMSTOP is high for the majority of people who use the service. This includes registration, and the overall experience of having the self-exclusion in place. Satisfaction with GAMSTOP was higher for those who no longer gamble at all (compared to those who currently gamble) and for those who experienced gambling-related harm prior to registration (compared to those who hadn't experienced gambling-related harm). The majority of people also found that GAMSTOP delivered against their expectations and that they would recommend it to others.

Registration

- **Motivation for registering with GAMSTOP:** The most common reason for registering with GAMSTOP was to stop gambling online altogether (55%), to regain control over their life (55%) and to spend less money on gambling (51%).
- **How people heard about GAMSTOP:** The most common way that people heard about GAMSTOP was through gambling websites (33%) followed by online searches (30%), word-of-mouth (18%), social media (9%). Young people were more likely to indicate they heard about GAMSTOP through word-of-mouth and social media, compared to those in older age groups, who were more likely to have heard about GAMSTOP through gambling websites.
- **Experience of registration:** 87% of people found it either very easy or fairly easy to register with GAMSTOP, 75% found it easy to navigate the website and 65% to find the support and resources they needed.

Overall satisfaction with GAMSTOP

- **Satisfaction with GAMSTOP:** 74% of service users are satisfied with GAMSTOP. Our survey also found that satisfaction was higher for those who no longer gamble at all (compared to those who gamble online or in-person currently) and higher for those who experienced gambling-related harm prior to registration (compared to those who hadn't experienced gambling-related harm).
- **Delivering against expectations:** The survey found that 78% of respondents believed that GAMSTOP had delivered the results that they were hoping for, with 12% indicating that it had not, and 8% not sure.
- **Recommending GAMSTOP:** 80% of respondents indicated that they would recommend GAMSTOP to someone they know.

Improvements to GAMSTOP

- **Exclusion length:** One key improvement outlined in interviews was to **provide the option of a longer or lifetime exclusion period** as this would provide greater “peace of mind” for those who use GAMSTOP to stop gambling online altogether.
- **Communication:** Whilst respondents were largely content with the current level of communication provided by GAMSTOP, a key theme emerging from the interviews was stress related to uncertainty around what would happen at the end of their minimum exclusion period.

1.2 Impact of GAMSTOP

Overall, our evaluation found that GAMSTOP is effective at reducing the amount that people gamble for the majority of people that use it. Our evaluation also found that GAMSTOP leads to a significant reduction in gambling-related harm across all four specified types (financial situation, relationships with friends and family, mental health, and physical health). Qualitative evidence indicates these effects are further enabled when individuals have an existing and sustained commitment to change their gambling behaviours.

Change in gambling behaviour

- **Gambling behaviour:** The frequency and amount of gambling was reduced under GAMSTOP, with 75% of respondents no longer online gambling and almost half (48%) no longer gambling at all.
- **Control of gambling behaviour:** Of those surveyed, 75% feel more in control of their gambling behaviours since registering with GAMSTOP.

Black-market gambling: Though GAMSTOP exclusion remains an effective blocking mechanism for licensed UK online gambling operators, some users are aware of and have engaged with unlicensed gambling operators since registering with GAMSTOP. Over a third (34%) of those that indicated they continue to gamble online indicated they have done so through unlicensed/illegal gambling operators, compared to 24% that indicated that they no longer having an exclusion in place, and 22% using someone else's account for licensed operators.

Change in gambling-related harms

- **Gambling-related harms:** Gambling-related harm was significantly reduced amongst respondents since registering with GAMSTOP, with 72% feeling safer from the negative effects of gambling. Generally, reduction was proportional to each type of harm, though current levels of harm were lowest for 'physical health' and 'relationships with friends and family'.
- **Legacy/enduring harm:** Some cases of gambling-related harm persisted, most significantly in relation to users' mental health and financial situation. The severity of gambling-related harm experienced prior to registration also influenced current levels of harm experienced amongst users.
- **Other support services:** Reliance on other gambling support services (including informal support) is low amongst GAMSTOP users, with over half (60%) of respondents currently using GAMSTOP as their only form of gambling support.
- **Reason for registration:** GAMSTOP was generally more impactful for those that had registered to self-exclude themselves, compared to those that had registered to exclude someone else from using their personal details to online gamble (affected others).

Demographics of GAMSTOP users

GAMSTOP service users are broadly reflective of the general population of gambling users across the key demographic factors including age, gender and ethnicity. This has broadly remained consistent since the previous evaluation. Across a range of demographic factors, GAMSTOP service users are diverse, covering a range of regions, income groups and lifestyles

- **Gender:** The majority of respondents in our survey indicated they identified as male (66%), compared to 34% that identified as female.
- **Ethnicity:** The vast majority of respondents (around 90%) were of White ethnic background, with considerably smaller proportions indicating they were from Asian (2%), Mixed (2%) or Black (1%) ethnic background. These findings differ to the ethnic makeup of the UK, with White respondents being representing a larger proportion in our sample than the national average.
- **Other demographic factors:** There was significant variation within a range of different demographic factors. For example, 21% indicated their households' annual income fell within the £55,000 to £99,000 band, 61% indicated that they had no children living in their household, and 32% indicated that they had a long-standing physical or mental impairment, illness or disability.

1.3 Conclusion

This evaluation has identified that GAMSTOP is an effective tool for reducing gambling-related harm for individuals seeking to exclude themselves from online gambling operators. Though there is variation in the reasons individuals register with GAMSTOP and the exclusion length they select, the service provided is widely considered both satisfactory and impactful. This is most significant for individuals with a sustained commitment to reducing their gambling behaviours, seeking a lifestyle change rather than a break. The evaluation found, however, that there was key variation across satisfaction, effectiveness and impact with these key factors being: the extent to which they are gambling now, the level of harms they were experiencing prior to registration, and whether they signed up to exclude themselves or someone they know (affected others).

1.4 Recommendations

For GAMSTOP

- **Exclusion length:** GAMSTOP users would like to have the option of longer exclusion lengths to provide greater “peace of mind” in their decision to no longer access online gambling. Therefore, service users could benefit from the offering of either a 10-year or 15-year exclusion.
- **Communication:** There could be a benefit to providing greater information to service users on the process after their minimum exclusion ends, perhaps as a message or email soon after registration.
- **Continued promotion across varied media:** GAMSTOP should continue to advertise through social media platforms, to effectively target young people.

For wider stakeholders

- **Addressing the issue of illegal gambling:** a key issue affecting GAMSTOP’s effectiveness in reducing online gambling is the prevalence of illegal or black-market gambling websites. Therefore, there needs to be increased regulation from government, the gambling commission and wider regulatory stakeholders to limit the prevalence and availability of these websites for use within the UK, and their promotion through social media.
- **Greater collaboration within support networks:** Our evaluation found that whilst a significant proportion of GAMSTOP users do not use other gambling support, some could benefit from having greater access to gambling support including therapeutic support, financial blocks or group support. Therefore, there could be a benefit to improving the links between support providers within the Gambling support sector, creating a network of support for users as opposed to stand alone offerings.

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2 Introduction

2.1 Context

GAMSTOP, previously trading as the National Online Self Exclusion Scheme, was established in 2016 by the Remote Gambling Association, in response to increased use of online gambling within the UK. GAMSTOP provides a single free portal that allows people to self-exclude from online gambling for a specified period (either six-months, one year or five years). As of 2019, the scheme has full coverage of all licenced gambling operators in the UK, providing full exclusion across all forms of online gambling. In addition, customers registered with GAMSTOP do not receive direct marketing from any gambling site with whom they are registered. As of September 2024, GAMSTOP is likely to surpass 500,000 registrations across the UK since it was established in 2016.

The gambling industry in Great Britain is significant in size, with an estimated value in excess of £15 billion as of 2023¹. A significant portion of all gambling activity and revenue is now online, with the number of active online gambling accounts in the UK having increased from 16.99 million in 2014 to 31.88 million in 2022². As of February 2024, approximately half of the population had participated in gambling activity within the past four weeks³. Whilst many people are able to participate in gambling activity at a safe level, for some, excessive gambling activity can create problems leading to potential gambling-related harm, which is defined as all adverse effects of gambling on the individual, families, communities and society⁴. This incorporates the harms associated at the financial, relationship, physical and mental health level. At the economy level, the sum of the direct financial costs to government and the societal value of health impacts associated with gambling-related harms was estimated in 2023 to be within the range of £1.05 to £1.77 billion per year⁵.

2.2 Purpose of the report

This report presents the findings from the evaluation of GAMSTOP, based on the findings of a survey, interviews conducted with GAMSTOP service users, alongside a review of secondary data, during the period of April – June 2024.

The evaluation has the following key aims:

¹ Gambling Commission (2023). Industry Statistics – February 2024 – Correction. Source: <https://www.gamblingcommission.gov.uk/statistics-and-research/publication/industry-statistics-february-2024-correction>

² Statista (2024). Number of active online gambling (remote) customer accounts in Great Britain from April 2008 to March 2022. Source: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/470106/online-remote-gambling-customer-accounts-britain/>

³ Gambling Commission (2024). Statistics on gambling participation – Annual report Year 1 (2023): Official statistics (Gambling Survey for Great Britain). Source: <https://www.gamblingcommission.gov.uk/statistics-and-research/publication/statistics-on-gambling-participation-annual-report-year-1-2023-official>

⁴ Gambling Commission (2020). Problem gambling vs gambling-related harms. Source: <https://www.gamblingcommission.gov.uk/statistics-and-research/publication/problem-gambling-vs-gambling-related-harms#:~:text=Gambling%2Drelated%20harms%20are%20the,people's%20resources%2C%20relationships%20and%20health>.

⁵ Office for Health Improvements and Disparities (2023). The economic and social cost of harms associated with gambling in England – Evidence update 2023. Source: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/63bc25b4d3bf7f262c5ad31f/The-economic-cost-of-gambling-related-harm-in-England_evidence-update-2023.pdf

- **Understanding Demographics:** Understanding the key demographics of GAMSTOP service users and the extent to which this aligns with the wider population that participate in gambling activity.
- **How people discover and engage with GAMSTOP:** Including understanding the source of awareness and understanding the duration between hearing about GAMSTOP and signing up for the service. This also includes understanding the frequency of website visits prior to registration.
- **User satisfaction:** To gain understanding of how satisfied customers are with the GAMSTOP portal, customer service and frequency of contact. The evaluation will also seek to gain insight into any changes that users would like to see to the service.
- **Usage patterns and reasons for ending exclusion:** Including the reasons for sign up, choice of exclusion length and reasons for no longer having an active exclusion. This would be used to understand how usage patterns vary based on the reasons for sign-up, and the extent to which the individual is at risk of experiencing gambling-related harm.
- **Identifying other support used in conjunction with GAMSTOP:** Understanding the proportion of GAMSTOP users who solely use GAMSTOP as their mode of support, compared to those who use alternative gambling support in conjunction with GAMSTOP.
- **Effectiveness of GAMSTOP:** Understanding the extent to which GAMSTOP has enabled its key outcomes of reducing gambling and the subsequent extent to which it reduces gambling related harm. The evaluation will seek to understand the role that GAMSTOP plays for individuals that are using the service as part of their recovery journey from problem or at-risk gambling.

In doing so, this report also aims to provide an update of the findings of the previous evaluation undertaken in 2021, and other research conducted on behalf of GAMSTOP⁶.

2.3 Structure of the report

The report is structured as follows:

- Section 2: provides a summary of the methodology undertaken
- Section 3: provides the findings relating to user experience of GAMSTOP.
- Section 4: provides the findings relating to the impact of GAMSTOP in reducing gambling-related harm and its users.
- Section 5: provides the findings relating to the demographics of GAMSTOP users.
- Section 6: provides a summary of the conclusions from findings across the key evaluation questions, alongside recommendations for the onward delivery of GAMSTOP.

⁶ Sonnet Advisory (2021). Evaluation the Effectiveness of the National Online Self-Exclusion Scheme. Source: https://www.greo.ca/en/greo-resource/resources/Documents/Sonnet-Advisory-and-Impact-2021_-_GAMSTOP-Evaluating-online-self-exclusion-scheme.pdf

3 Methodology

This evaluation applied a mixed methods approach which included the delivery of a survey (n = 4,651) and qualitative in-depth interviews (n = 40) conducted with GAMSTOP users. To assess the impact of GAMSTOP, the evaluation took a theory-based approach, deploying Contribution Analysis. A full description of the methodology is provided in the Technical Annex.

3.1 Evaluation framework

The evaluation sought to address the key evaluation questions outlined in Table 2.1.

Table 3.1: Evaluation framework

	Evaluation Question	Method of assessment
EQ1.	Who uses GAMSTOP?	Survey findings
EQ2.	How do people become aware of and sign up for GAMSTOP?	Survey and interview findings
EQ3.	Why do people sign up for GAMSTOP?	Survey and interview findings
EQ4.	What is the experience of using GAMSTOP?	Survey and interview findings
EQ5.	To what extent does GAMSTOP reduce gambling related harm?	Contribution Analysis
EQ6.	To what extent does GAMSTOP support adults who experience, or are at risk of, gambling-related harm within a broad safety network?	Survey and interview findings

3.2 Survey methodology

The evaluation implemented a survey of GAMSTOP users, which was provided to approximately 175,000 GAMSTOP users who consented to take part in research. The survey achieved a total sample size of n = 4,651. The purpose of the survey was to provide evidence across all of the evaluation questions, covering the key topics of the demographics of GAMSTOP users, the user experience of GAMSTOP and its effectiveness. The survey was delivered online and was approximately 15 minutes in length (equating to approximately 40 questions).

3.3 Qualitative interview methodology

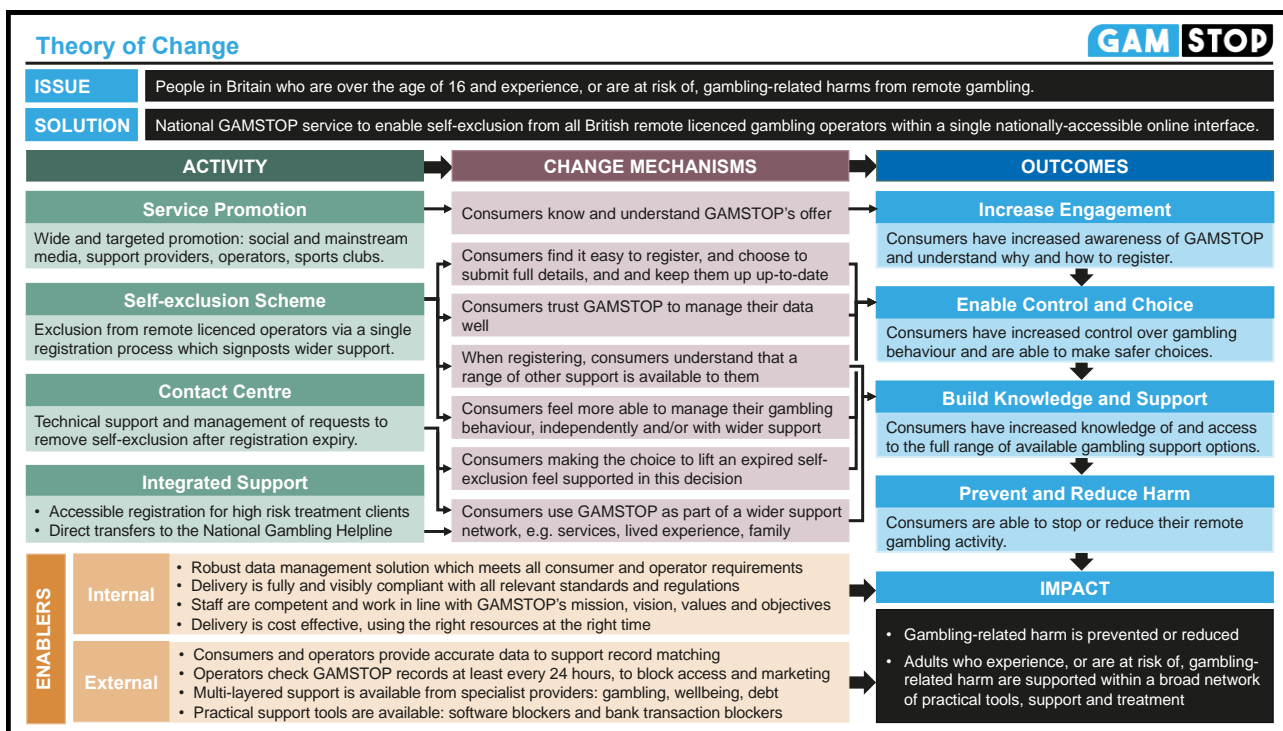
The survey findings were completed by n = 40 in-depth qualitative interviews with GAMSTOP service users. The purpose of these interviews was to provide a rich understanding of the lived experience of GAMSTOP users, enriching the survey findings with detailed understanding of the journey and experience of GAMSTOP users. The interviews sought to provide detailed insight into how people use GAMSTOP and the role the service plays within customers' recovery journeys.

The interviews conducted were semi-structured and approximately 45 minutes in length. The sample for the interviews was based on the individuals who consented to be contacted for further research in the survey. We ensured that the sample included a range of different views, experiences and backgrounds, by sampling across key quotas including age, gender, ethnic background, region, exclusion length and whether or not the participant was still participating in gambling.

3.4 Contribution Analysis

To evaluate the impact of GAMSTOP in reducing gambling-related harm (EQ5), we took a contribution analysis approach. This is a theory-based evaluation approach, which uses the triangulation of data sources to examine the extent to which the outcomes (and underlying mechanisms) identified in the programme theory of change⁷ (Figure 2.1) are achieved. Whilst this doesn't provide definitive proof of causation, it can robustly demonstrate plausible attribution of an outcome to a programme⁸.

Figure 3.1: GAMSTOP Theory of Change



Based on this theory of change, we identified and explored two key pathways by which GAMSTOP could lead to a change in gambling-related harm. Whilst both are built on an understanding that a reduction in gambling leads to a reduction in gambling-related harm, they differ based on the extent to which participation leads to a behaviour/mindset change. These are:

- Contribution Claim 1: GAMSTOP reduces gambling-related harm as it reduces the time and money an individual spends on online gambling activities.

⁷ This was an existing theory of change developed by GAMSTOP prior to the start of the evaluation.

⁸ Magenta Book (2020) https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5e96cab9d3bf7f412b2264b1/HMT_Magenta_Book.pdf and Annex A analytical methods for use within an evaluation https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5e96c41a86650c2dd9e792ea/Magenta_Book_Annex_A_Analytical_methods_for_use_within_an_evaluation.pdf

- **Contribution Claim 2:** GAMSTOP reduces gambling-related harm as it enables the individual to develop the ability to self-manage their gambling activity through behavioural change.

We then triangulated the survey, qualitative interview findings and wider findings from secondary sources to examine:

- **Achievement of the outcome:** the extent to which there has been a change in the amount of gambling activity undertaken and the amount of gambling-related harm experienced by the population of GAMSTOP users.
- **Contribution of GAMSTOP:** The extent to which achievement of the outcome can be attributed to GAMSTOP. This includes verifying the validity of each of the two contribution claims highlighted above, and the underlying assumptions, to understand the causal mechanisms underpinning the change in gambling-related harm observed. This also includes exploring possible alternative explanations, such as the prevalence and effectiveness of alternative gambling support that could explain a reduction in the gambling-related harm experienced.

A full detailed methodology of the contribution analysis approach undertaken is provided in the Technical Annex, including the contribution analysis and assessment framework.

3.5 Limitations

The evaluation is subject to the following key limitations:

- **Response bias:** The survey sample included a significantly higher proportion of respondents of older age groups compared to the registration data held by GAMSTOP. This is likely to be due to older age groups tending to be more likely to respond to surveys compared to younger age groups. This is likely to have led to bias in our findings to be more reflective of the experience of GAMSTOP users of older age. It is also reasonable to assume that individuals who felt either strongly about their experience (either positively or negatively) may have been more likely to respond to the survey, compared to those who felt less strongly about their experience. Therefore, our results may have been subject to a degree of bias that may have meant our findings were more polarised.
- **Self-reported data:** the findings from both the survey and interviews regarding user experience, level of gambling prior to GAMSTOP and current level of gambling relied on self-reported data, which is likely to have been subject to bias to some degree. For example, individuals may be subject to recall bias, over- or under-estimating the prevalence or nature of past experiences, and social desirability bias, participants providing answers in a way that makes them look good to others, even if it isn't truthful. For the latter, we have mitigated the extent of social desirability bias across our research by ensuring participants were aware of their anonymity and lack of judgement.

4 User experience of GAMSTOP

Headline Findings

- The most common motivation for self-exclusion with GAMSTOP was to **stop gambling online altogether (55%)**, to **regain control over their life (55%)** and to **spend less money on gambling (51%)**.
- The most common way that people heard about GAMSTOP was **through gambling websites (33%)**, followed by **online searches (30%)**, **word-of-mouth (18%)**, **social media (9%)**.
- **87% of people found it either very easy or fairly easy to register with GAMSTOP**, 75% found it easy to navigate the website and 65% to find the support and resources they needed.
- **74% of service users are satisfied with GAMSTOP**. Satisfaction was higher for those who no longer gamble at all, compared to those who gamble online or in-person currently.
- One key improvement outlined in interviews was to **provide the option of a longer or lifetime exclusion period** as this would provide greater “peace of mind” for those who use GAMSTOP to stop gambling online altogether.
- Whilst respondents were largely content with the current **level of communication** provided by GAMSTOP, a key theme emerging from the interviews **was stress related to uncertainty around what would happen at the end of their minimum exclusion period**.

4.1 Introduction

This section presents the evaluation findings against the key evaluation questions of:

- **EQ3: Why do people register with GAMSTOP?**
- **EQ4: What is the customer experience of GAMSTOP?**

This draws primarily on key survey findings reviewed against the key themes, issues and points of discussion outlined in the service user interviews.

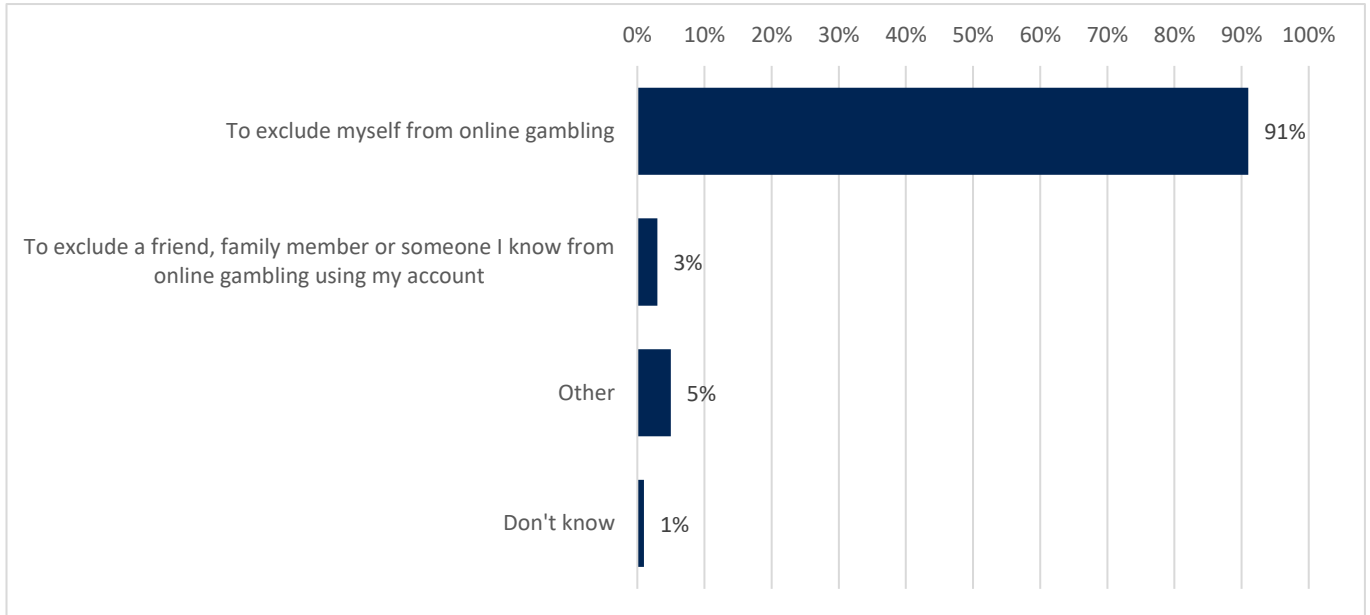
4.2 Registration

The majority of survey respondents (57%) indicated that they had signed up for GAMSTOP between 1 and 5 years ago, with a total of 24% indicating they had registered within the past year. 15% indicated that they signed up more than 5 years ago. Our survey also explored the types of registration, with the vast majority of respondents (91%) indicating that they had signed up to exclude themselves from online gambling. However, 3% of respondents indicated that they had registered to exclude a friend, family member or someone they know from online gambling using their account or personal details⁹. This group of respondents are affected others: people affected by the gambling behaviour of a friend, family member or person they know. In addition, a further 5% of respondents indicated that their motivation for

⁹ Assuming that the survey undertaken as part of this evaluation was representative of the population of GAMSTOP users, this would constitute a total of approximately 15,000 of the total 500,000 registrations with GAMSTOP are affected others.

registration with GAMSTOP was other, which included a range of different reasons including to stop fraudulent activity with their banking or gambling account.

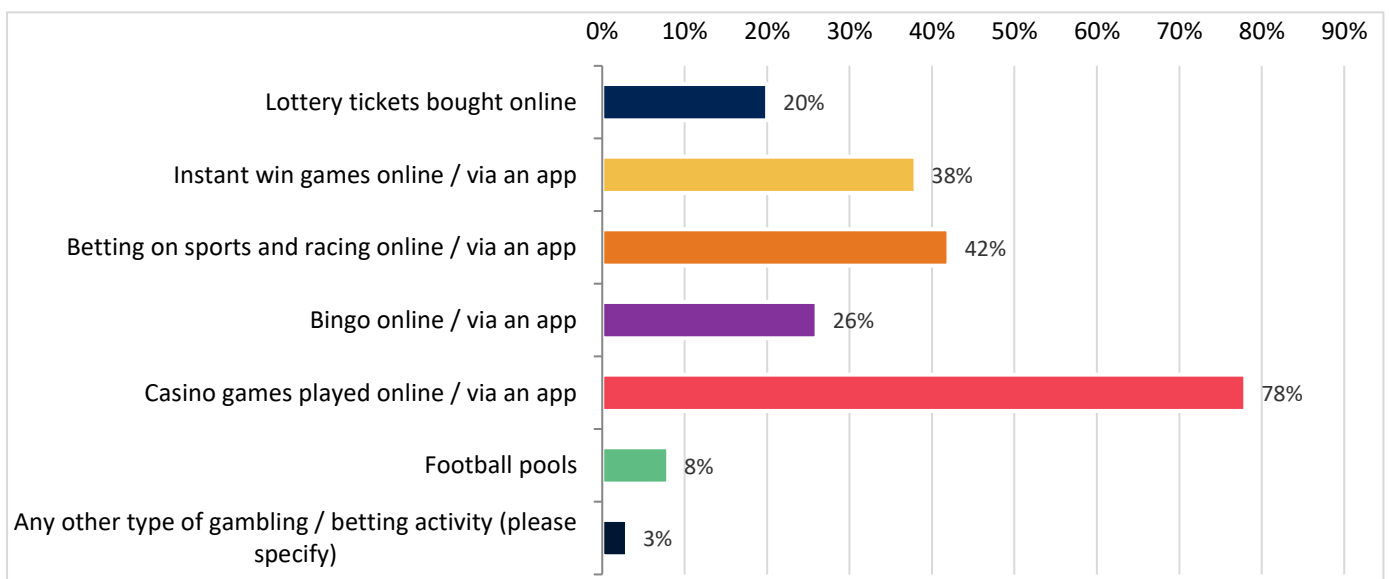
Figure 4.1: Reasons for registration



Q6. QD6: Why did you register with GAMSTOP?. Base: n = 4,651

Figure 4.2 outlines the most common forms of online gambling that survey participants indicated they had used (ever) prior to registration with GAMSTOP. A significant majority of participants indicated that they had used online casino games (78%). This was followed by online sports betting (42%) and instant win games (38%). The survey also found that those that indicated they had experienced gambling-related harm prior to registration (across the four elements of mental health, physical health, financial situation and friends and family) were more likely to indicate they had used casino games than those who had not experienced any negative impact.

Figure 4.2: Types of online gambling used by GAMSTOP users prior to registration



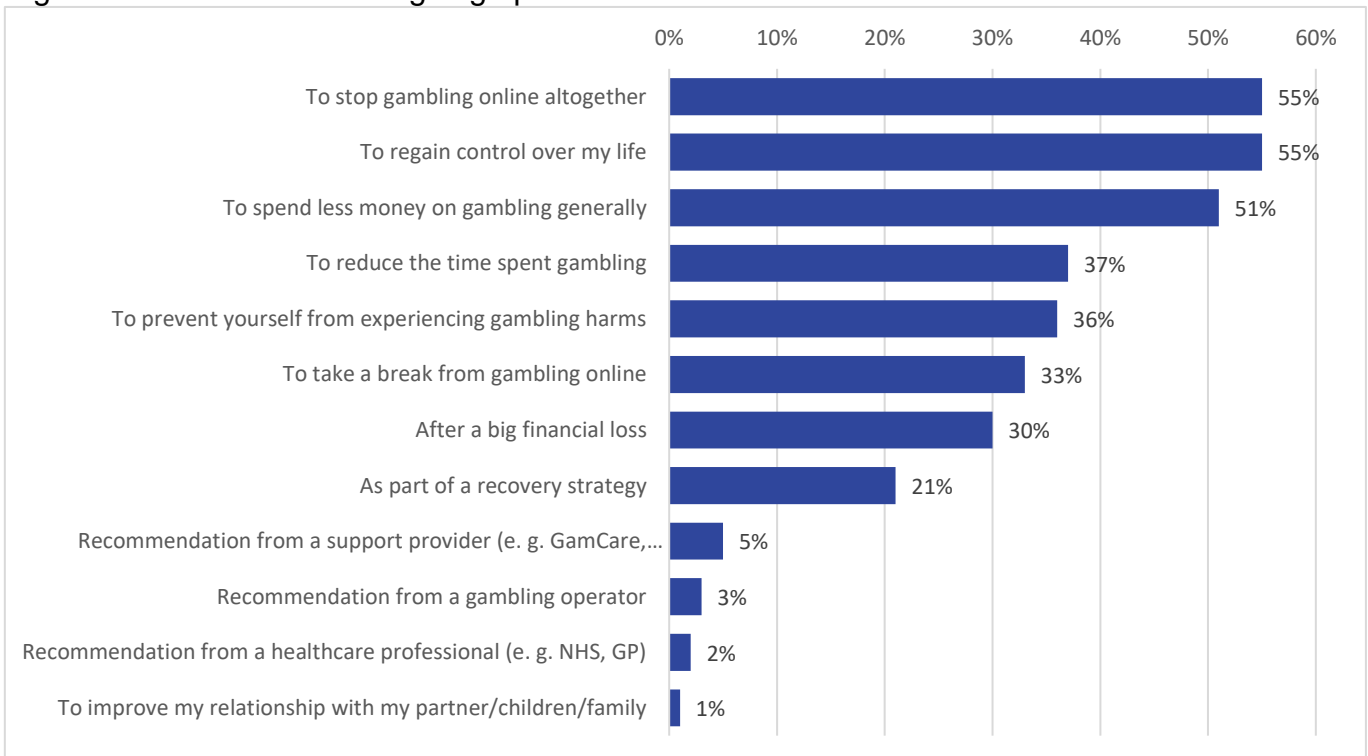
Q. Before using GAMSTOP, which of the following forms of online gambling, if any, did you engage with most frequently? Base: n = 4213.

Motivation for registration

Participants in the survey expressed a range of different motivations for registering to GAMSTOP, with the key motivations for people signing up including to stop gambling online altogether (55%), To regain control over their life (55%) and to spend less money on gambling (51%), as outlined in Figure 4.3. Only 2% of respondents indicated that their main motivation for signing up was due to a recommendation from a healthcare professional and 1% of responses of the motivations were to improve the relationship with their partner/children or family member. This trend was consistent across a range of different demographics, including age, gender, ethnicity, and region. However, we found the following key trends in the motivations for registering to GAMSTOP:

- **Age group:** Respondents who indicated that they were motivated to register to GAMSTOP because they wanted to stop gambling altogether, or they wanted to regain control of their life, were significantly more likely to be within the 35-44 age group compared to the 18-24 age group.
- **Exclusion length:** Respondents on a 5-year exclusion were significantly more likely to indicate that they were motivated to register with GAMSTOP to stop gambling online altogether. (62% for those on a five-year exclusion, compared to 43% on a one-year, and 33% on a six-month exclusion). Participants on a six-month exclusion were also more likely to indicate that they registered to take a break from gambling online.
- **Gambling-related harm:** Registering with GAMSTOP to take a break from gambling online was more likely to be reported by those who indicated that they had experienced little or no gambling-related harm prior to registration (across all of the four aspects of harm including mental health, physical health, financial health, and relationships with family and friends) than those who indicated they had experienced gambling-related harm. The most common motivations provided by those that experienced gambling-related harm pre-GAMSTOP were to regain control over their life and to stop gambling altogether.

Figure 4.3: Motivations for signing up to GAMSTOP



Q12: Which of the following, if any, were your MAIN motivations for registering with GAMSTOP? Please select as many as apply. Base: n = 4213

“For me, it was like, how do I protect myself? How can I eradicate this from my life? I had no reason to do it. I don't enjoy it and all of a sudden, I'm back to doing it again, so let's just ... ban myself.” Service user, five years, no longer gambles

The evidence from the qualitative interviews with service users aligns with the survey evidence, with a key theme emerging of participants wanting to regain control over their life or their gambling behaviour. A key aspect that related to this was a large financial loss, or in some cases a large win¹⁰, which acted as a moment of realisation that they had lost control of their gambling behaviour in some way. The appeal of GAMSTOP, according to interviews, was that it “takes the decision out of their hands”, compared to self-exclusion offered through individual gambling operators or other forms of gambling support. A finding that emerged from the interviews that differed from that in the survey was the effect of friends and family in motivating people to sign up to GAMSTOP. This finding was more likely to be expressed by those who were previously less aware of, or less willing to admit, the extent of their gambling activity in terms of the amount of money or time spent. A key theme emerging from participants in the interviews who indicated that they were motivated by friends or family to register was the desire to use GAMSTOP as “proof” to the family member or friend that they were accessing gambling support.

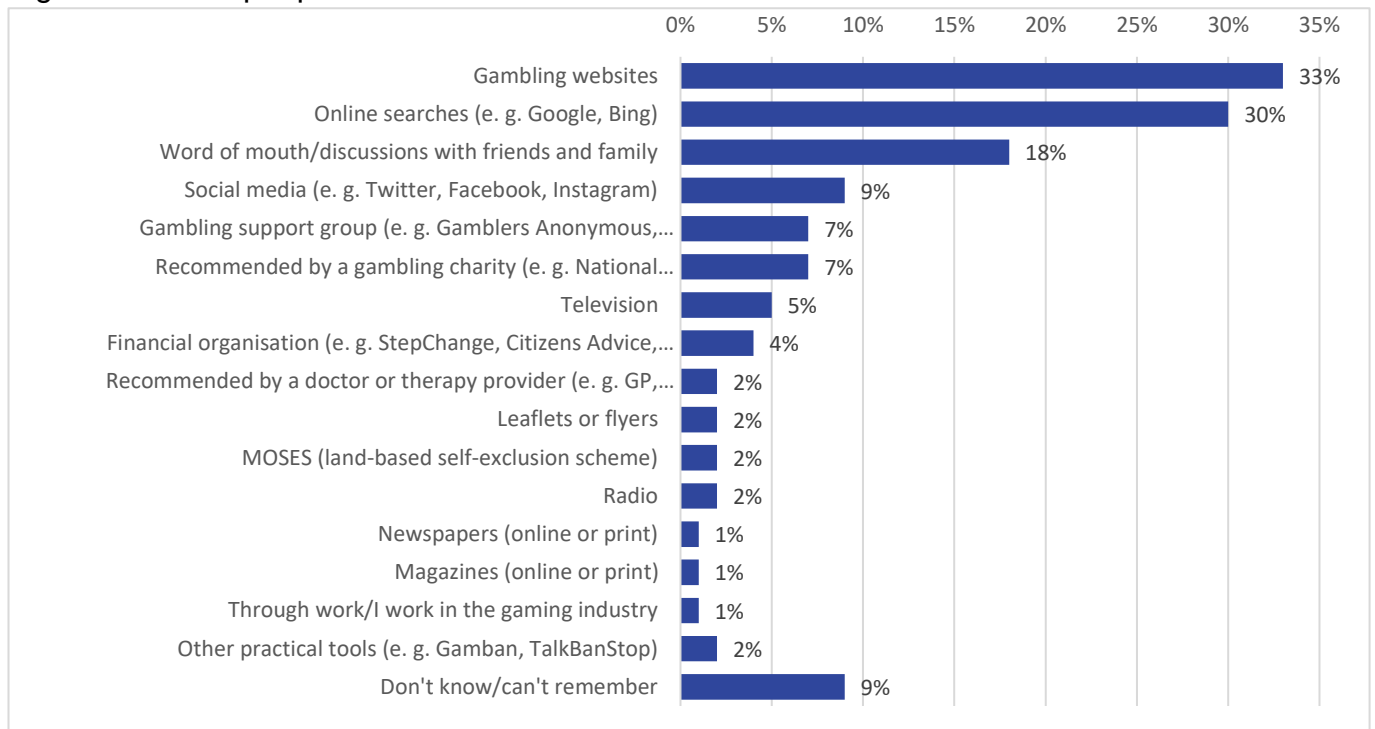
“It was after a particularly bad experience ... I was waiting for a £5,000 withdrawal; I think I deposited £4,000 in total over several deposits. I had a £5,000 withdrawal and it wasn't processed by the company... I sat up all night, reversed the withdrawal and lost it all. And on the Sunday, I just felt so bad” – Service user, multiple six-months exclusions, still gambles online

How people heard about GAMSTOP

Our survey found that the most common way that people heard about GAMSTOP was through gambling websites (33%), followed by online searches (30%), word-of-mouth (18%), social media (9%), recommendation by a gambling support group (7%), and recommendation from a gambling charity (7%). All survey responses are outlined in Figure 4.4:4.

¹⁰ This included a number of different situations relating to winning a large amount of money. For example, one participant discussed that they won a large sum of money, only to then continue gambling until all the money they had won was gone. For another participant, who was keeping their gambling activity secret from their family, indicated that winning a large sum of money presented issues with hiding it from their family, which acted as a moment of realisation.

Figure 4.4: How people heard about GAMSTOP



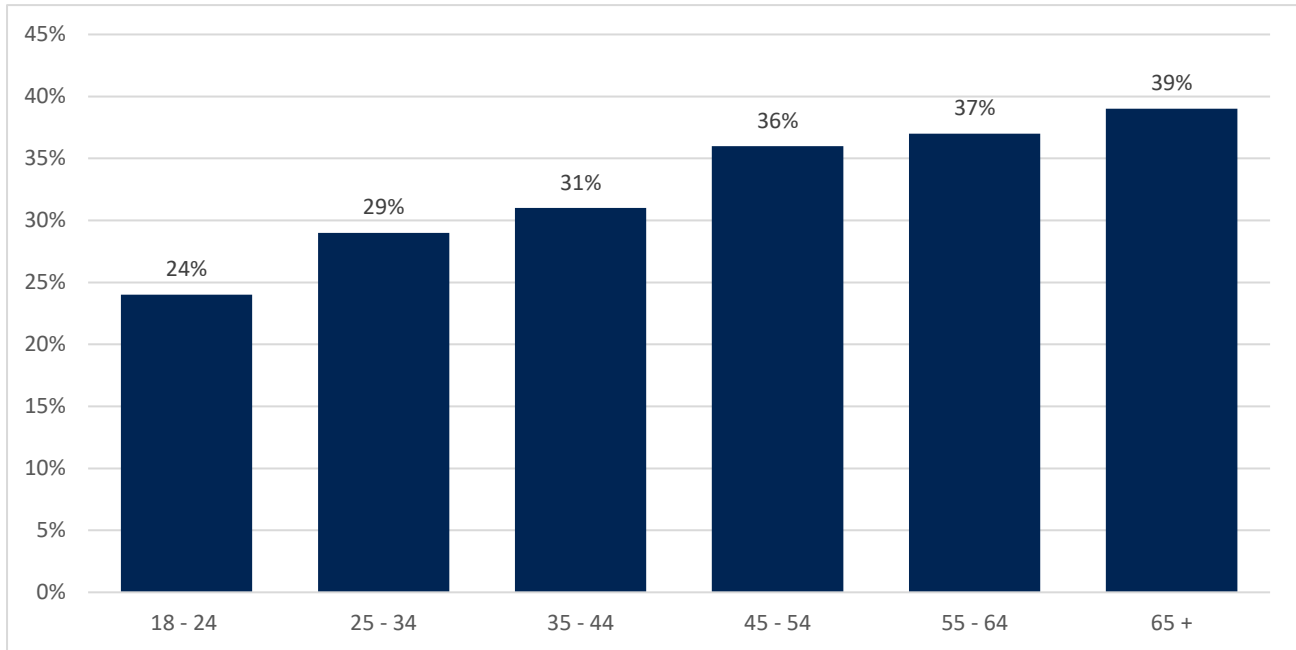
Q. From which of the following, if any, did you first learn about GAMSTOP? Base: n = 4,651

The survey found some variation on the ways in which respondents heard about GAMSTOP across key factors including:

- Age group:** The proportion of participants who indicated they heard about GAMSTOP through gambling websites increased with age group, with 24% of 16-24 and 39% of the 65+ age group. Younger cohorts were also more likely to indicate they heard about GAMSTOP through word-of-mouth (32% of the 16-24 age group, compared to 12% of the 55-64 age group, and 15% of the 65+ age group). Participants in the age group 25-34 were most likely out of the different age groups to indicate they heard about GAMSTOP through social media (13%) compared to 9% for all participants.
- Exclusion length:** We also found that there were a slight, but statistically significant, difference based on exclusion length, with participants with a six-month exclusion most likely to indicate that they heard about GAMSTOP through gambling websites (38%) compared to 36% on a one-year exclusion, and 32% on a five-year exclusion. A greater proportion of respondents on a five-year exclusion length indicated that they had heard about GAMSTOP through a gambling support group (9%) compared to those on a one-year exclusion (4%) and a six-month exclusion (3%).
- Length of time since registration:** Service users who registered more than 5 years ago were more likely to indicate that they had heard about GAMSTOP through online searches, gambling support groups, or recommended by a gambling charity, compared to respondents who had registered more recently. For example, 36% of those who registered more than 5 years ago indicated that they had heard about GAMSTOP through online searches, compared to 21% of those who registered less than six months ago.
- Affected others:** We also found that respondents who indicated they had signed up on behalf of someone else (affected others), were more likely to indicate that they had heard about

GAMSTOP through word-of-mouth (29%) compared to respondents who had signed up to self-exclude (18%).

Figure 4.5: Proportion of participants that heard about GAMSTOP through gambling websites by age group

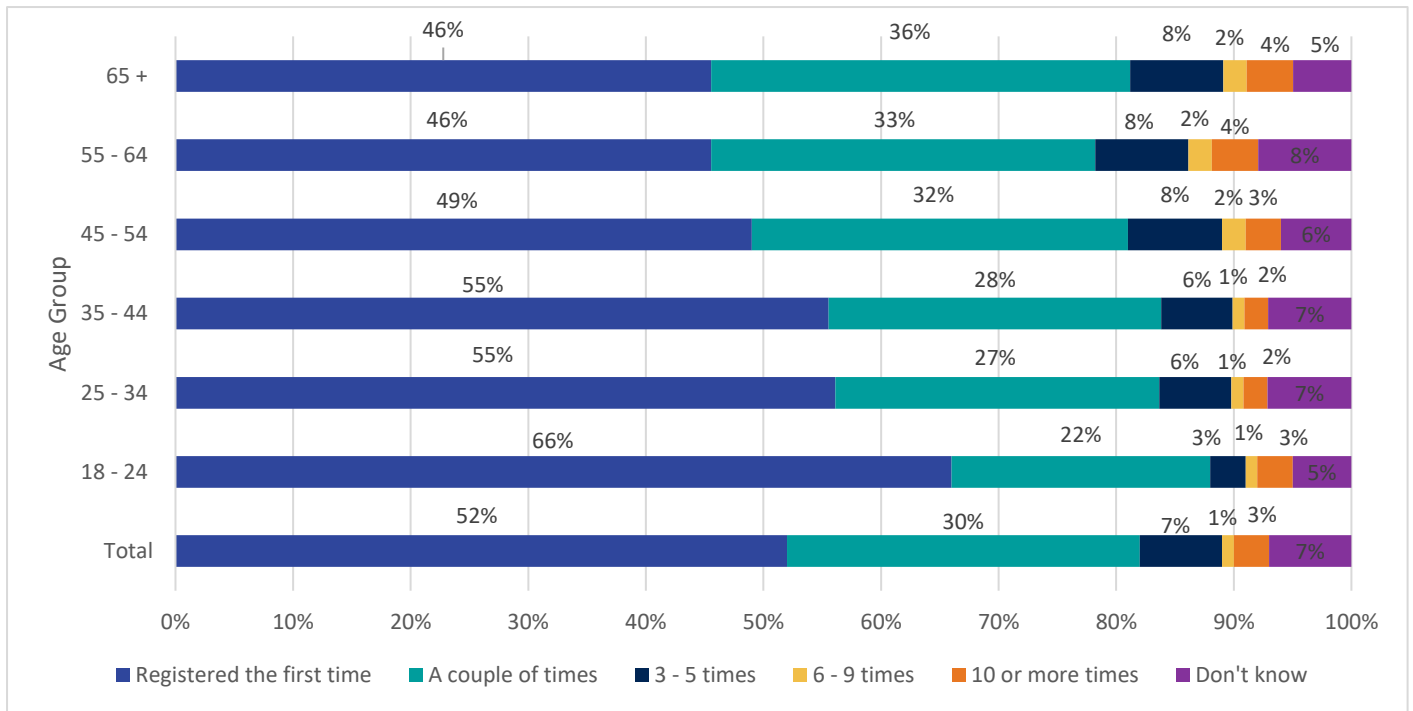


Q14. From which of the following, if any, did you first learn about GAMSTOP? Base: n = 4,651

Visiting the website

Our survey also investigated the number of times people accessed the GAMSTOP website before registering. We found that the majority of GAMSTOP service users registered to the service within a few times of visiting the website, with 52% of respondents in the survey indicated that they signed up for GAMSTOP the first time they visited the website, 30% with a couple times and 7% 3 to 5 times. We found that those within the 16-24 age group were most likely to indicate they had registered within the first time of accessing the website (66%), with this decreasing for each age group (46% for respondents within the 65+ age group). We did not, however, find any other clear trends in the number of times respondents registered against any other demographic background including ethnic background, gender, region or ethnicity.

Figure 4.6: Variation in number of times service user visited the GAMSTOP website before registering by age group.



Q15. How many times did you view the GAMSTOP website before you registered for the service? Base: n = 4,651

We found that participants who indicated they experienced gambling-related harms, (across mental health, physical health, financial health, relationships with family and friends) were less likely to indicate that they signed up first time (49% of participant indicating negative effects on mental health, compared to 63% of those who indicated that they experienced no negative impact on their mental health prior to registering with GAMSTOP). This could be indicative that for those that have experienced gambling-related harm prior to registration, it may be a more difficult decision to make.

“When I lost this last £300, I thought, 'Right, that is it. You know. I'm not going to go to sleep, I'm going to register now.' I just, you know, it's like, if you're going to learn to swim, get in the water, you know. Just do it, and once it's done, you're done.” Service user, five-years, no longer gambles

Experience of registration

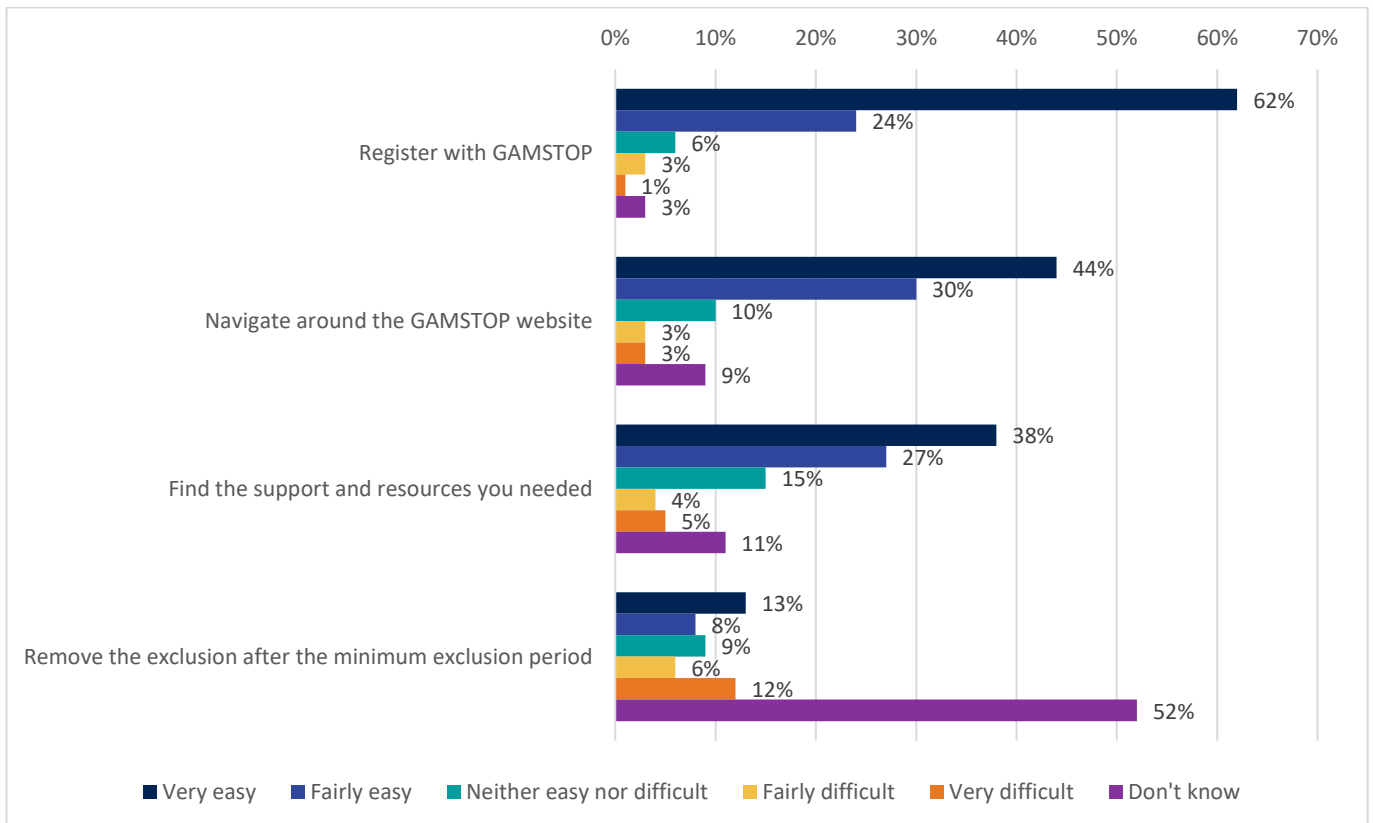
The evidence from across the survey and interviews indicates that the majority of GAMSTOP users have a positive experience in registering with GAMSTOP. The survey found that 87% of respondents indicated it was either very easy (62%) or fairly easy (24%) to register with GAMSTOP, and 4% who found it difficult to register¹¹. This finding was largely consistent across demographic subgroups, exclusion length, time since registration, amount of time spent gambling, or harms experienced prior to registration. One key variation our survey uncovered was that a smaller proportion (78%) of those who excluded for someone else (affected others) found it easy to register with GAMSTOP, compared to those who self-excluded (89%). However, this may not indicate that affected others faced greater difficulties in registration, as only 5% of affected others indicated that they found it difficult to register, whilst 12% indicated that it was neither difficult nor easy to register. This could indicate that affected others were

¹¹ 6% of respondents indicated that they found it neither easy nor difficult and 3% indicated that they don't know.

more likely to respond neutrally, rather than necessarily having greater difficulties in registration than those who self-exclude.

In addition to the findings related to registration, 75% of respondents indicated that it was easy to navigate the site, 65% that it was easy to find the support and resources needed. Furthermore, 21% of respondents indicated that it was easy to remove the exclusion after the minimum exclusion period, 18% that it was difficult, and 56% indicated that they didn't know, which is likely to capture the significant proportion of participants who have not yet reached the end of their minimum exclusion period. If we exclude this group, 27% found it very easy, 17% found it fairly easy, 18% neither easy nor difficult, 12% fairly difficult, and 26% very difficult.

Figure 4.7: Ease of using GAMSTOP



Q. From your experience using GAMSTOP how easy or difficult would you say it is to do each the following?
 Base: n = 4,651

Participants in the interviews with service users largely considered registration to be a very straightforward, smooth and easy to complete process. Interview participants did not provide any significant discussions of improvements that could be made to the registration process, and in interviews where participants discussed the level of information required from the service user to register, it was generally seen as justified given the nature of the service provided by GAMSTOP.

“...the actual process was quite easy. Mentally, it was quite hard because obviously it feels like a big thing because you've been gambling for so long and so much, and then suddenly, once you've signed up, then it's just gone.” Service user, six-months exclusion, still gambles occasionally

4.3 Experience of GAMSTOP

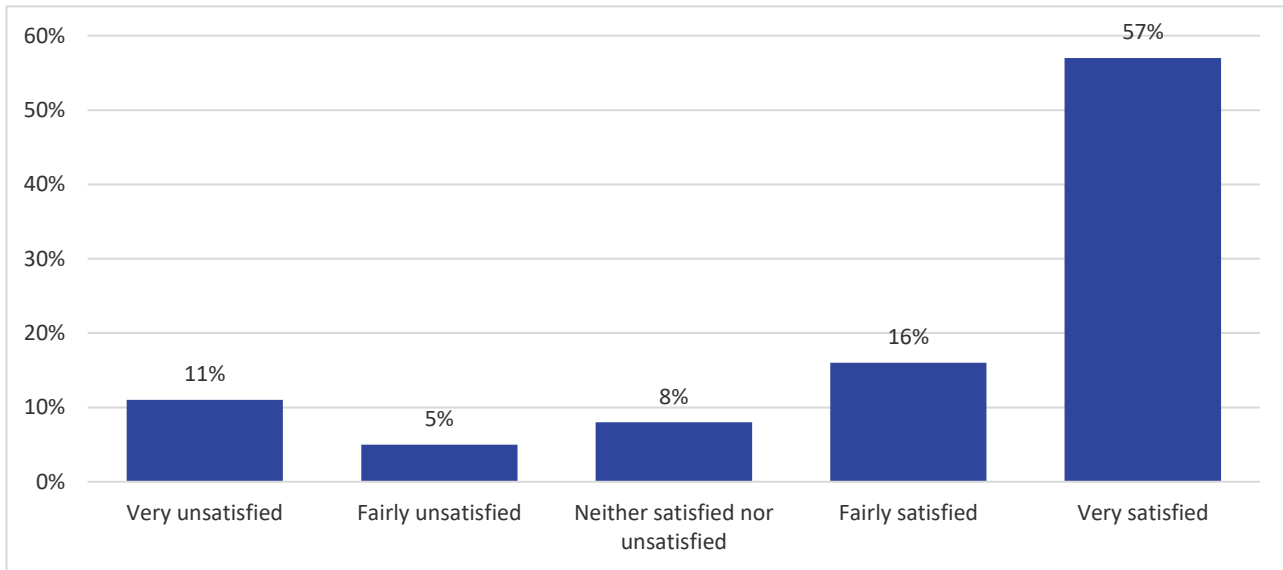
Overall, the survey and interviews indicate that a considerable proportion of GAMSTOP's users are satisfied with the service provided, believe that GAMSTOP delivered against their expectations and that they would recommend it to others. However, this depended on a number of key factors which included the nature of their gambling behaviour and the harms they were experiencing prior to registration and currently.

Satisfaction with GAMSTOP

The survey found that 74% of respondents were satisfied with GAMSTOP compared to 16% that were unsatisfied. This comprises 57% of respondents who indicated that they were very satisfied and 16% of respondents who indicated that they were fairly satisfied, as outlined in Figure 4.8. This varied across a number of key outcomes:

- **Current gambling behaviour:** Participants that indicated that they no longer gamble at all had the highest level of satisfaction (85%) compared to 60% who mostly gamble online, 77% who mostly gamble in-person, and 78% who only gamble in person.
- **Frequency of current online gambling:** For those that still gamble online, (which includes those whose exclusion period had ended, those who use illegal gambling, or who use someone else's account) we found lower satisfaction the higher the frequency they indicated they currently gamble (43% of those who still gamble every day compared to 69% of those who currently gamble once or twice a month).
- **Gambling-related harm experienced pre-GAMSTOP:** Participants who indicated they experienced gambling-related harm prior to registration had higher satisfaction in the service compared to those who indicated they had not experienced gambling-related harm prior to registration. This was consistent across all four avenues of gambling-related harm considered. For example, 80% of those who indicated that they experienced a negative impact on their mental health from gambling prior to GAMSTOP indicated they were satisfied, compared to 59% of those who experienced no negative impact.
- **Gambling-related harm experienced currently:** Participants who indicated they were currently experiencing gambling related harm had marginally lower satisfaction in the service compared to those who indicated they were not currently experiencing gambling-related harm. However, the magnitude of this difference is small, with, for example, 80% of those who indicated they currently experience no negative impact on their financial situation being satisfied, compared to 76% of those who indicated they currently experience a negative impact on their financial situation.
- **Self-exclusion vs affected other:** 77% of those who registered to GAMSTOP to exclude themselves from gambling indicated they were satisfied with GAMSTOP, compared to 57% of those who registered to exclude a friend, family member or someone they know from using their account or personal details(affected other).

Figure 4.8: Satisfaction with GAMSTOP in survey responses



Q. Based on your overall experience, to what extent, would you say you are satisfied or dissatisfied with GAMSTOP? Base: n = 4651

“Gamstop literally did what it said on the tin, it stopped me from being able to register with gambling websites, which was the major issue.” Service user, five-year exclusion, no longer gambles

Delivering against expectations

The survey found that 78% of respondents believed that GAMSTOP had delivered the results that they were hoping for, with 12% indicating that it had not, and 8% not sure. In addition, 80% of respondents indicated that they would recommend GAMSTOP to someone they know. The proportion of respondents indicating that GAMSTOP delivered against expectations was consistently high across a range of different demographic factors, including region, ethnicity, gender, education, annual household income or disability status. However, this proportion increased with age, with 82% of those in the 55 to 64 age group indicating that GAMSTOP had delivered against expectations, compared to 73% of those within the 18 to 24 age group.

In addition, the extent of to which participants felt that GAMSTOP had delivered against expectations and whether they would recommend GAMSTOP followed a similar pattern to satisfaction rates. Those who were still gambling or experiencing gambling-related harm were less likely to feel GAMSTOP had delivered against their expectations or recommend GAMSTOP. There was also a similar trend for affected others, with 60% indicating that it delivered against their expectations compared to 82% of those who self-excluded.

The qualitative interviews provided some explanation as to the trends observed in the survey. Participants who expressed that they were satisfied with GAMSTOP often also indicated that it had enabled them to stop gambling or reduce the amount they gambled. Participants who indicated that they were still gambling, either through accessing in-person gambling or unlicensed online gambling, were more likely to feel that GAMSTOP had not been effective. This is because in these cases, whilst GAMSTOP had stopped them being able to access licenced online gambling operators, their access to in-person or unlicensed gambling had meant they had not limited their gambling activity, which was the primary aim of registration with GAMSTOP. This was not always the case with those who had removed their exclusion, as in some cases GAMSTOP had worked as intended to provide them with a break from online gambling. For affected others, evidence from interviews indicated that whilst GAMSTOP was

useful for protecting their banking details or accounts from being used for gambling purposes, it did not directly address the gambling behaviour of their friend or family member. Therefore, the satisfaction and the extent to which it delivered against expectations may be less clear, given that they may have not seen a change in the gambling behaviour of their friend or family member, and therefore the gambling-related harm they are experiencing as an affected other.

“GAMSTOP was brilliant because it listed everything and when I first started looking at, literally, every site that was on the internet at the time, GAMSTOP had the blocker on it, and it was such an easy process to use, at the same time. So, there was no, ‘Oh, I don’t know what to click.’ They made it very clear what to click and what you were signing up for and everything else.” – Service user, five-year exclusion, no longer gambles

Improvements to GAMSTOP

The survey and interviews did not provide an extensive list of improvements that could be made to GAMSTOP and its service offering, which is reflected in the high levels of satisfaction outlined above.

However, one key improvement highlighted in interviews and in open-ended responses to the survey was the option for longer, or lifetime exclusion lengths. Interview participants indicated that a lifetime exclusion, rather than five years, would provide them with the “peace of mind” that they would be no longer able to access online gambling for the indefinite future. Whilst it may be difficult for GAMSTOP to provide lifetime exclusions, given the regulatory and data protection issues associated, there may be weight behind the benefits of offering a longer exclusion length, such as 10 years.

“I mean, if there’s not a lifetime one then I think there should be. If it’s 5 years plus, or what, I’m not entirely sure how that works. But yes, I do think there should be an unlimited ... I think even after 5 years, you could still potentially be at risk there.” – Service user, five-year exclusion, no longer gambles

Participants in qualitative interviews also discussed feelings of anxiety or stress at the thought of their exclusion period, in most cases a five-year exclusion period, coming to an end. Some participants were not aware of whether or not they would be immediately able to re-access their online gambling accounts following the end of their minimum exclusion period. When, in these cases, the interviewer informed them that the exclusion would continue automatically for another seven years unless otherwise stated, participants were often relieved that this was the case. Therefore, an improvement to GAMSTOPs service could be to provide greater communication to those who registered on the processes that will happen at the end of their minimum exclusion period. Whilst this is currently provided on the registration page of the GAMSTOP website, additional communication could be provided. This could be either soon after registration or near to the end of their minimum exclusion period, although the latter option could present some risks of reminding or triggering service users about the availability of online gambling.

For qualitative interview participants that were unsatisfied with GAMSTOP, this was often cited as being due to feeling that it had not worked at reducing either the amount of gambling they were undertaking. This was due to them currently participating in in-person gambling or through illegal online gambling operators. This is explored in further detail in Chapter 5.

However, our survey found that 58% of respondents were happy with the current level of communication, compared to 12% who would prefer slightly more, 6% who would prefer far more, and 10% who would prefer far fewer. Wanting to receive more communication from GAMSTOP was more likely to be expressed by those who indicated they currently were experiencing gambling-related harm, compared to those who did not.

Case study

Rachel

Affected Other
five-year exclusion
registered over five years ago
Female, 55-64, South West, White



“... I looked to do GAMSTOP to protect myself. I could see it being a really good way for him [her son] to stop gambling but at the same time, also, protect myself against anymore kind of losses.”

Rachel is in her late 50s and has two adult sons. Rachel was a single parent for her sons growing up and has always had a close relationship with them. Rachel's son, Matthew, is now in his late 20s and has struggled with gambling since he was 18. Matthew's gambling began when he gambled significant amounts of money given to him by family members for his 18th birthday. Matthew continued to gamble when he moved out to go to university. Matthew's gambling continued for another six years after this, in which he faced significant financial difficulties. He relied on payday loans and borrowing money from family, friends and colleagues. This significantly impacted his family, especially Rachel, who felt unable to help Matthew. Matthew would use family members' details to access gambling websites, causing a significant breakdown in trust and support from his closest support network.

Throughout this period, Rachel herself was struggling with Matthew's gambling behaviours and sought help. She felt financially at-risk from her son's gambling and also feared that their relationship was unsalvageable because of the breakdown in trust. Rachel decided to sign up to GAMSTOP to financially protect herself, by preventing Matthew from using her details. She also made Matthew aware of GAMSTOP, hoping he would register too. She felt frustrated and concerned that her son was not choosing to access support, despite her guidance. Matthew did not register with GAMSTOP and continued to gamble, leading to him attempting to take his own life on two separate occasions. Following this difficult period for Matthew and his family, he signed up for gambling support through Gordon Moody, which included signing up for GAMSTOP. Matthew has been in recovery for over a year and a half. He no longer gambles at all.

Rachel feels that GAMSTOP gave her greater control over her finances when Matthew was struggling, and also feels it has been an important blocker for Matthew now he is registered. However, she feels that the therapeutic support offered through Gordon Moody was the key driver of her son being able to gain control of his gambling, with GAMSTOP helping to contribute towards that. Matthew is in the process of rebuilding his relationships. Rachel and her son now have a more open and trusting relationship. She continues to access support herself and ensures Matthew accesses support too.

5 Impact of GAMSTOP

Headline Findings:

- **Gambling behaviour:** GAMSTOP led to a reduction in the frequency of gambling for participants, with 75% of respondents no longer online gambling and almost half (48%) no longer gambling at all. 75% feel more in control of their gambling behaviours since registering with GAMSTOP. There has been an overall reduction in gambling behaviours as users have not replaced previous online gambling activity with in-person gambling to the same extent.
- **Black-market gambling:** Though the GAMSTOP exclusion remains an effective blocking mechanism for licensed UK online gambling operators, some users are aware of and have engaged with unlicensed gambling operators since registering with GAMSTOP. Of respondents that indicated they still gamble online, over a third use unlicensed/illegal gambling operators that are not blocked by GAMSTOP.
- **Gambling-related harms:** Gambling-related harm was significantly reduced amongst respondents since registering with GAMSTOP, with 72% feeling safer from the negative effects of gambling, though current levels of harm were lowest for 'physical health' and 'relationships with friends and family'. Some enduring cases of gambling-related harm persisted, most significantly in relation to users' mental health and financial situation. Many users have developed healthy behaviours to help manage gambling-related harms since registering with GAMSTOP.
- **Affected others:** Those that had signed up to GAMSTOP to exclude someone else from gambling using their accounts had varied experiences with GAMSTOP and its effectiveness. This was largely informed by the extent to which the individual gambling had reduced their gambling behaviours over time.
- **Other support services:** 60% of service users currently use GAMSTOP as their sole gambling support, indicating that a limited proportion of GAMSTOP users use a layered approach to gambling support.

5.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the impact of GAMSTOP, by assessing the extent to which GAMSTOP has led to reduction in gambling-related harm. This chapter will begin by exploring changes to gambling behaviour under GAMSTOP, followed by the changes to gambling-related harm. It will then outline the extent to which this impact can be attributed to GAMSTOP, considering the extent of the impact and alternative explanations beyond GAMSTOP's services.

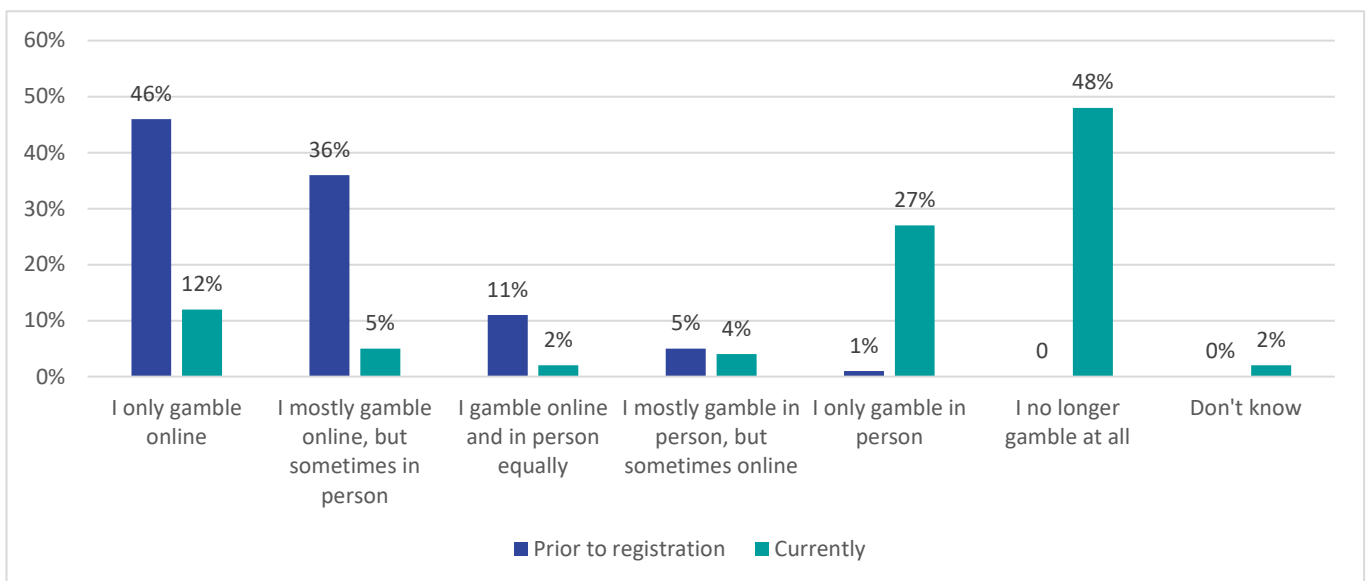
Contribution Analysis was used to assess the extent to which any changes in gambling-related harm can be attributed to GAMSTOP, through the triangulation of both the survey, qualitative evidence and wider secondary sources, using the contribution analysis framework (see Technical Annex). The survey did not collect data on whether respondents have removed their exclusion (for safeguarding purposes), which influences this report's assessment of GAMSTOP's impact on reducing gambling and gambling-related harm. Attempts to directly compare impact findings from the previous evaluation of GAMSTOP have not

been taken because of differing survey formats, though comparisons have been made on broader trends and conclusions where relevant.

5.2 Changes to gambling behaviour

Overall, the survey indicated that fewer users gamble online since registering with GAMSTOP, with 75% of respondents indicating they no longer gamble online and 48% indicating that they no longer gamble at all. When comparing current gambling with previous behaviours, the use of online gambling has significantly reduced, with just 12% currently indicating that they only gamble online compared to 46% prior to registration. Figure 5.1 also demonstrates that the number of users that mostly gamble in-person has increased since registering with GAMSTOP, with the number of individuals ‘only gambling in-person’ increased from 1% to 27% since registering with GAMSTOP, suggesting that *some* respondents may have replaced or partially substituted online gambling activity with in-person activity.

Figure 5.1: Change in gambling behaviour



Q: i) Generally speaking, before registering with GAMSTOP, did you mostly gamble online or in person? ii) Do you now, if at all, mostly gamble online or in-person?. Base: All who use GAMSTOP to self-exclude from online gambling (n=4213)

We found there is variation in the extent to which the change in gambling behaviour, outlined in Figure 5.1, was realised based on a number of key factors:

- **Previous gambling activity:** Whilst the proportion of in-person to online gambling has shifted since GAMSTOP registration, previous gambling behaviour is also important to consider. Those that now mostly gamble online (17%), were more likely to have mostly online gambled pre-GAMSTOP. For those that now mostly gamble in-person (31%), they were more likely to have mostly gambled in person previously. This indicates that whilst some users may have replaced online gambling with land-based forms, previous gambling behaviours (relating to in-person/online) has some influence over current gambling activity.
- **Exclusion length:** Individuals that signed up to GAMSTOP with a five-year exclusion length were more likely to indicate that they gambled mostly/only in-person, than individuals on six-months or one-year exclusions. This could be explained in that those with shorter length exclusions no longer have an exclusion in place and are now able to gamble online. Nevertheless, individuals with a five-year exclusion length were more likely to have stopped gambling entirely compared to the shorter durations. Qualitative findings further indicated that

individuals selecting a five-year exclusion length were more likely to be motivated to stop online gambling behaviours altogether, rather than to take a 'break'.

- **Gender:** Female respondents were significantly more likely to no longer gamble, with 58% selecting this option.

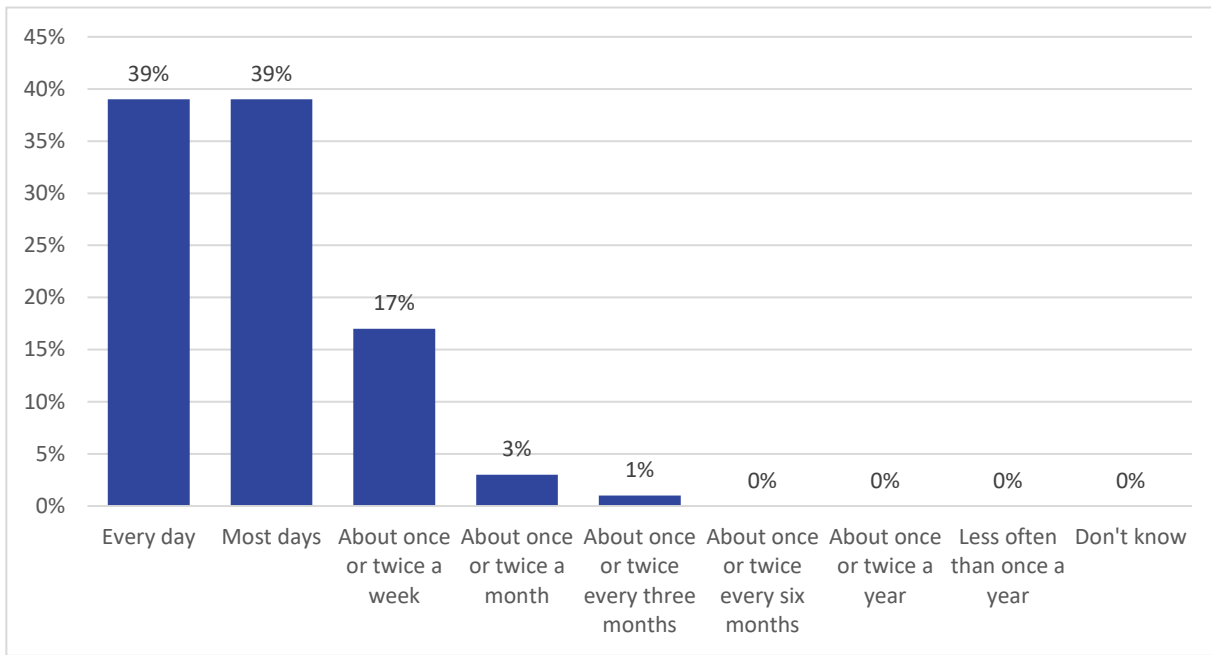
Qualitative evidence generally indicates that whilst some users did increase the amount of in-person gambling since registering with GAMSTOP, this was not to the same extent (through time or money spent) as previous online gambling behaviour. Interview participants' current engagement with in-person gambling varied significantly depending on the nature of their gambling activity prior to registering with GAMSTOP and their ability to access land-based forms of gambling. Some participants had land-based exclusions in place alongside GAMSTOP, and many participants also expressed disinterest in in-person gambling as it was considered less convenient (particularly in rural areas) and less discreet than gambling online. The risk and potential harm posed by in-person gambling was also considered far less significant. One participant expressed that GAMSTOP facilitated a shift in mindset towards gambling, so they no longer have the urge to gamble online or in-person:

"Putting GAMSTOP on has changed my viewpoint completely, you know. I hardly look at horseracing. I don't feel the urge to gamble any more. I don't think, for example, my wife's out today, looking after our grandchildren. I could go out to the betting shop all afternoon, she wouldn't know, she doesn't come home until 6[...] but I don't want to. I don't feel the need to."
– **Service user, five-year exclusion, no longer gambles**

Frequency of gambling

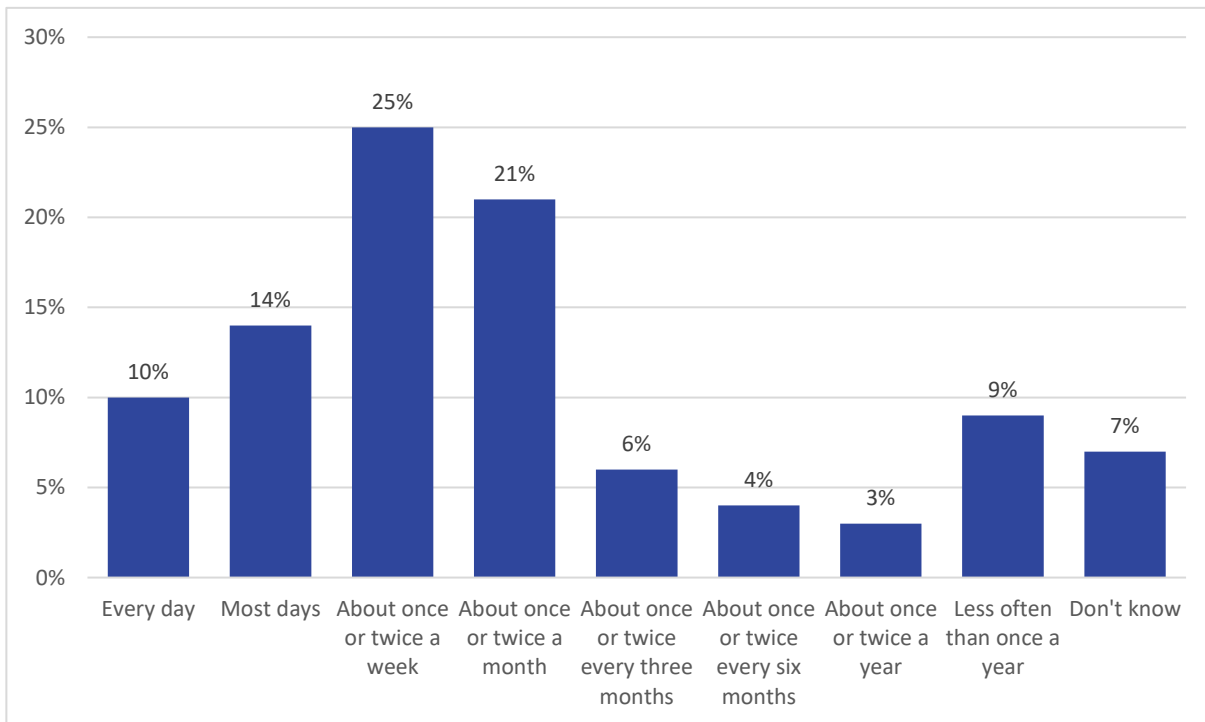
Figure 5.2 provides a breakdown of the frequency of gambling pre-GAMSTOP, whilst Figure 5.3 provides evidence of the frequency of gambling currently for those who indicated they still currently gamble online. Figure 5.3 cannot be directly compared with Figure 5.2 as it only refers to the 23% that indicated they currently online gamble. Instead, these two figures demonstrate that of those that still currently gamble, this is now less frequent since signing up to GAMSTOP. This indicates that whilst GAMSTOP has contributed to some users stopping gambling entirely (Figure 5.1), it has also meant users who still use online gambling continue to do so at a lesser frequency than prior to registration. Some respondents surveyed no longer had an exclusion through GAMSTOP in place and are currently able to online gamble, meaning the efficacy of GAMSTOP is harder to assess for these individuals.

Figure 5.2: Frequency of online gambling prior to registration to GAMSTOP



Base: All who use GAMSTOP to self-exclude from online gambling (n=4213)

Figure 5.3: Frequency of online gambling currently (excluding respondents that no longer online gamble)



Base: All those who still gamble online (n=1037)

There were some emerging trends visible amongst the small group of respondents that continue to online gamble since registering with GAMSTOP (23% of all respondents), including:

- **Previous gambling activity:** The amount an individual gambled prior to registering with GAMSTOP was a strong indicator for current frequency of gambling. For example, those that online gambled ‘everyday’ prior to registering, were the most likely to still be online gambling

‘everyday’. This trend was apparent for all frequencies, indicating that to some extent existing gambling patterns persisted despite registration with GAMSTOP.

- **Recency of registration:** Users that registered with GAMSTOP less than six months ago were more likely to still be online gambling every day (based on a small base size). However, this trend is not apparent for other gambling frequencies (e.g. ‘most days’, ‘about once or twice a week’) thus indicating the recency of registration has only a small impact on the current frequency of online gambling amongst the 23% that currently online gamble.
- **Exclusion length:** For those that stated they ‘no longer gamble at all’, this was significantly higher amongst those with an exclusion length of five years compared to shorter exclusion lengths. Of respondents that still mostly gamble online, respondents that had put an exclusion length of six months exclusion were more likely to online gamble than those with a five-year duration. This may be partially explained in that individuals that registered with a shorter exclusion length in some instances no longer have an exclusion in place.

More generally, qualitative evidence further substantiates the findings that GAMSTOP users spend less time online gambling since registering with GAMSTOP. Some participants referred to the large amounts of time lost to online gambling prior to registration, and the sense of liberation as GAMSTOP enabled them to gain more time. Whilst the survey data indicates that users with a longer length exclusion period may reduce their online gambling more, many interview participants found that GAMSTOP had helped to reduce the frequency of online gambling irrespective of their exclusion length. Some participants selected a shorter length exclusion period (e.g. 6 months) to act as a short break and to challenge current habits, with impact of varying effect.

“I think it [GAMSTOP] helped me to reduce the amount of time I spent gambling, because I was spending a lot of time gambling previously. And having a 6 month break, you realise how much time you’re wasting just sitting there on your phone or in the casino. So, I think it helped to definitely do it less.” **Service user, Female, 6 month exclusion**

Whereas some participants selected a longer length exclusion period to go “cold turkey” with longer-term motivations to completely end their gambling behaviours:

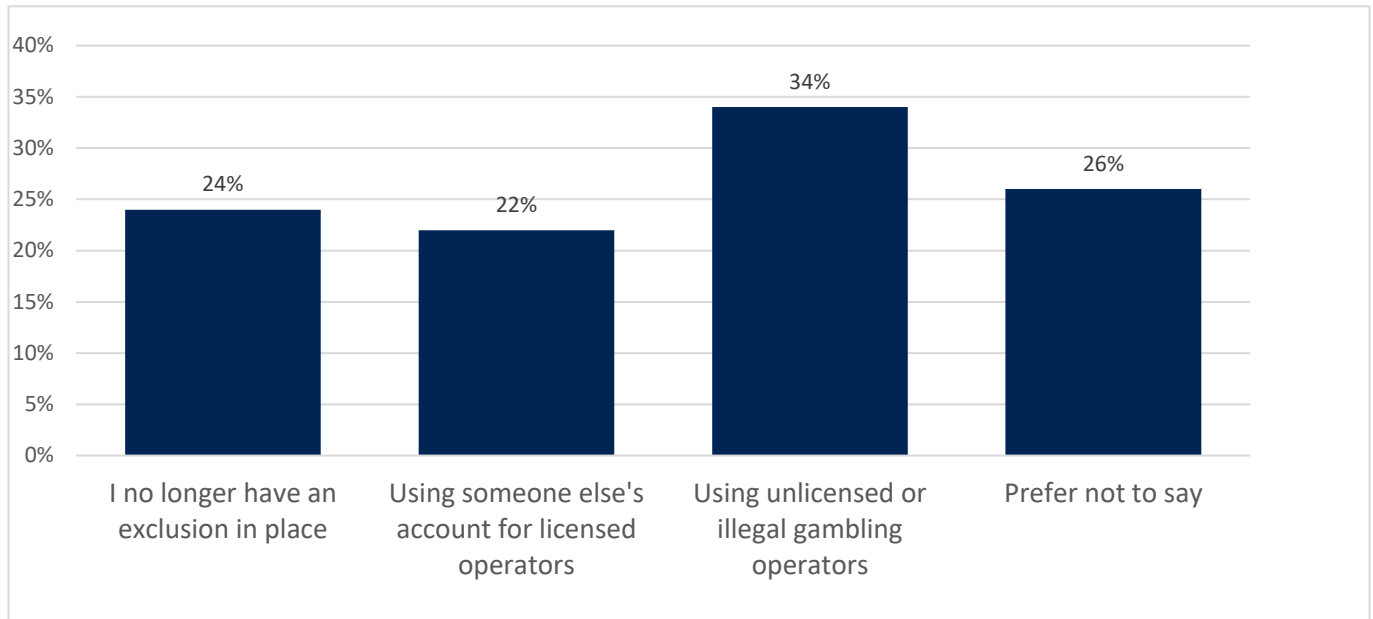
“...when I registered with GAMSTOP, there was a sense of deep relief. ‘I’ve done it now.’ There’s, like, sort of, cutting your left hand off. You can’t ever use it again. Yes, it’s 5 years, but I think the 5 years have broken the cycle” – **Service user, five-year exclusion, No longer gambles**

Illegal/unlicensed gambling

The prevalence of illegal/unlicensed gambling operators, not covered by the GAMSTOP exclusion, was a significant issue for some GAMSTOP users. Figure 5.4 outlines our survey findings of how, for those who indicated they currently gamble online, participants are currently accessing online gambling. With participants able to pick multiple options, over a third (34%) indicated that they had used unlicensed/illegal gambling operators, 24% that they no longer have an exclusion in place, 22% that they had access through someone else’s account and a further 26% selected ‘preferred not to say’. Though not directly comparable, GAMSTOP’s previous evaluation also identified noteworthy use, with 10% of all respondents having accessed unlicensed gambling operators.¹²

¹² Sonnet Advisory & Impact (2021), GAMSTOP: Evaluating the effectiveness of the national online self-exclusion scheme.

Figure 5.4: How people currently access online gambling

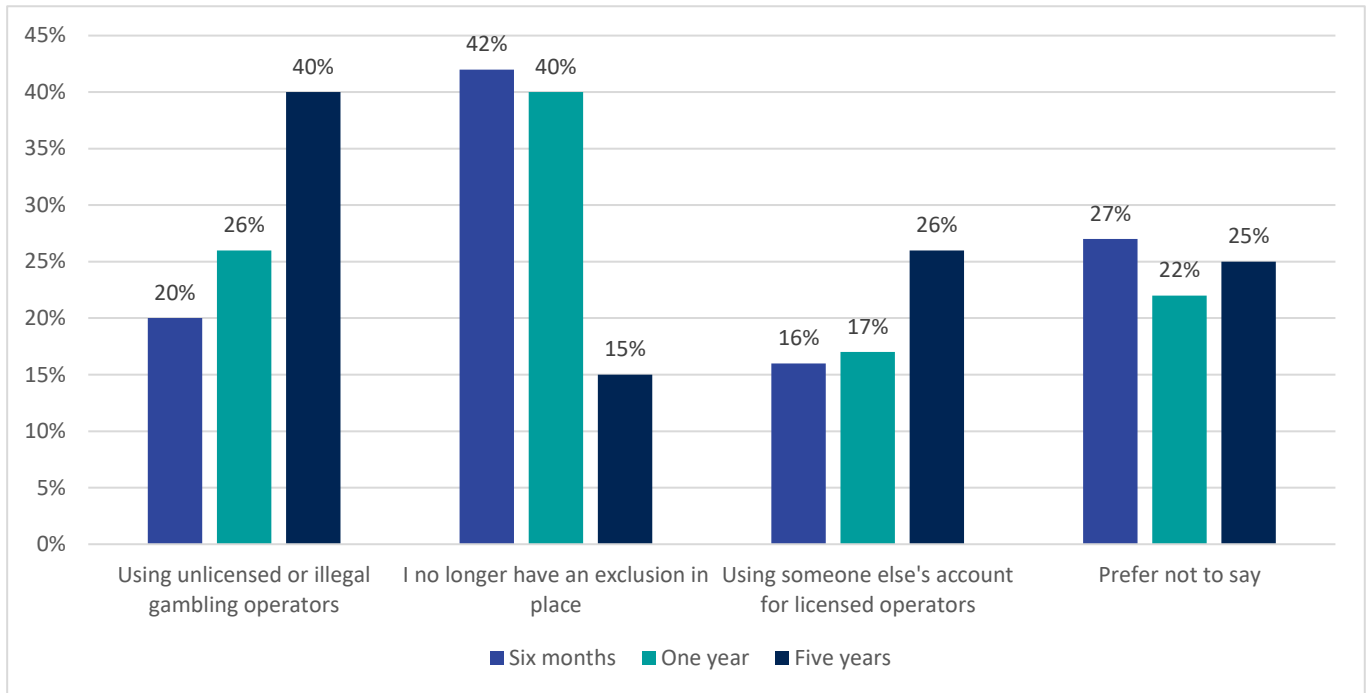


Q. You indicated that you currently gamble online, could you please let us know how you do so? Base: All those who still gamble online (n=1037)

Moreover, our survey findings highlighted that all those using illegal/unlicensed gambling operators were more likely to currently be experiencing all four types of gambling related harm, demonstrating the importance of understanding which types of users are more likely to be engaging with these operators. Within the group that are currently using illegal/unlicensed online gambling operators, there were some identifiable trends:

- **Age group:** Respondents aged between 25 to 34 were significantly more likely to be accessing these operators.
- **Exclusion length:** Respondents with a five-year exclusion length were also significantly more likely to be currently using illegal operators, as demonstrated in Figure 5.5. Whilst this graph indicates that individuals with a shorter length exclusion (most notably a 6-month exclusion) are less likely to use illegal operators, they are also less likely to have an exclusion in place. This can therefore be explained by the assumption that individuals that still have an exclusion in place (who tend to have longer exclusion lengths) are more likely to seek out 'loopholes' like that of illegal/unlicensed operators. Thus indicating that GAMSTOP users with a longer length exclusion are at greater risk to using unlicensed/illegal gambling operators.

Figure 5.5: Comparison of exclusion length with currently access to online gambling



Q. You indicated that you currently gamble online, could you please let us know how you do so? Base: All those who still gamble online (n=1037)

The prevalence of these operators and the harm they pose was echoed in interviews with service users. Illegal/unlicensed gambling operators was a significant issue raised by participants, with many raising concerns over targeted advertisement of websites claiming to be "not on GAMSTOP". There were some instances when participants had lost significant amounts of money to these websites. Some participants felt these websites under GAMSTOP remained largely accessible.

"It's incredibly easy to circumnavigate the GAMSTOP, incredibly easy in just about every way, you know. And it's good for, you know, online mainstream gambling and I think it's a good resource for contacting other people if you have an issue and taking yourself further on. But, in terms of being an effective tool to get in between a gambler and gambling places, it doesn't work. It's anybody that's got any will whatsoever, [they] can get past that instantly." – Service user, five-year exclusion, still gambles

However, many participants expressed scepticism towards these websites, with many feeling they were too risky. This was due to barriers to entry, including higher minimum deposits, worse bets, or longer times for withdrawals to take place. This meant that participants, in some cases, were less likely to use illegal gambling operators to the same frequency as prior to registration.

"I was logging in [to unlicensed websites] every day, maybe have an hour at times, so yes it's an issue. But, what I would say is, there are far fewer of them, they are harder to access, it's more complicated. So, there are, sort of, natural barriers and restrictions on the way." – Service user, multiple six-months/one-year exclusions, still gambles

For the proportion of GAMSTOP users who indicated that they had gambled online through the use of someone else's account, the qualitative evidence indicates that this may be more of an ad hoc occurrence, rather than a high frequency activity. Interview participants indicated that there had been instances where they had used others accounts, but this had been infrequent due to the barriers such as the person not knowing, the person restricting use to only limited occasions (such as only for major

sporting events, or limiting the frequency). Therefore, this could indicate that this online gambling activity may generate less gambling-related harm compared to the gambling activity prior to registration.

Case study

Rhia

Service User

Five-year exclusion

Registered 4.5 years ago

Female, 35 to 44 years, East Midlands, Asian



“I’d self-exclude and then go to another website and self-exclude and go to another website.”

Rhia is in her 30s and is employed in the financial sector. She started gambling when she was 18, often on skills-based games (e.g. backgammon) or sports. For these first few years, Rhia felt in control of her gambling. When working in her early-twenties, one day Rhia went with colleagues to a casino to celebrate the bonus they had been paid that day. She continued to go after this first instance with a friend from work. These visits became increasingly more regular, and Rhia began to go to casinos by herself. Her friend stopped going but she continued in secret. At one stage, Rhia was spending at least 3 hours gambling straight after work each day, either in a casino or online.

Rhia’s gambling started to have a negative impact on her mental health, which made her have the urge to gamble even more. She became withdrawn from her relationships with friends and family, seeing people less and less. Her gambling was also impacting her ability to work and her financial security. Rhia recognised her gambling was becoming a problem and began to exclude herself from in-person casinos within her local area. Soon after she began online gambling instead. Rhia also set up self-exclusions for individual online casino operators, though she would then continue to online gamble through other operators.

Rhia became aware of GAMSTOP and the option to self-exclude from all operators. It took 3 months to confirm this decision and register with GAMSTOP. Rhia chose the 5 year exclusion to ensure she was unable to online gamble for the foreseeable future. She also used therapy and Gamban to support her recovery from gambling. Therapy was complementary to the blocking mechanisms (most notably GAMSTOP as it could not be removed) for Rhia’s recovery. Since registering with GAMSTOP, she no longer gambles at all. Rhia now prioritises her wellbeing by cooking healthy meals, sleeping more, and picking up active hobbies, such as running and swimming. If given the option by GAMSTOP, Rhia would opt for a lifetime ban to ensure she can sustain her recovery journey without the risk of relapse.

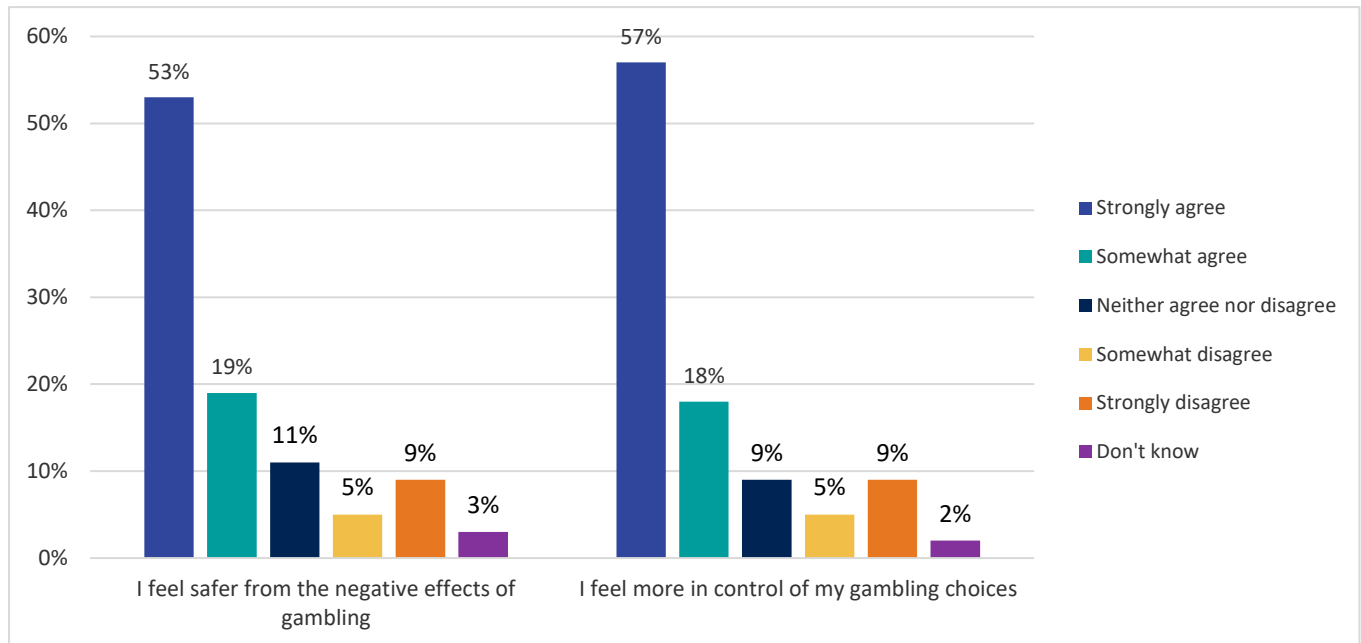
5.3 Changes to gambling-related harm

Overall trends of gambling-related harm

Both the survey and qualitative interview findings identified GAMSTOP users have experienced a significant reduction in gambling-related harm since registering with GAMSTOP. Figure 5.6 illustrates GAMSTOP’s impact on service users, demonstrating that most users feel safer from the negative effects of gambling (72%) and more in control of gambling choices (75%) since before they registered with GAMSTOP. These findings are comparable, though slightly lower than GAMSTOP’s previous evaluation

in which 84% reported feeling safer from the negative effects of gambling and more in control of their gambling choices.¹³

Figure 5.6: How do you feel about online gambling now compared to the time before your GAMSTOP registration?



Q. To what extent do you agree with the following statements...? Base: All who use GAMSTOP to self-exclude from online gambling (n=42 13)

Current levels of gambling-related harm vary across GAMSTOP user sub-groups, with the most significant variation determined by: the nature of their current gambling, the recency of their registration and the exclusion length in place.

- **Demographic indicators:** Some of the groups that continue to experience greater gambling-related harm more generally include ethnic minorities, individuals with a disability/illness, and male respondents. Across all four types of gambling-related harm, females are more likely to be experiencing 'no negative impact at all' from gambling activity, however both males and females reported broadly similar levels of gambling-related harm beyond this category., with the exception of impact on relationships with friends and family more negative for males. As previously highlighted female respondents were more likely to have stopped gambling compared to male respondents, possibly explaining some of the minor differences in harm experienced.
- **Nature and frequency of gambling:** Amongst individuals that continue to gamble, those that mostly gambling online are more likely to experience a negative impact across all four types of harm (financial situation, relationships with friends and family, mental health, and physical health) than those that mostly gamble in-person. Qualitative findings further substantiated this trend, with online gambling widely considered more harmful than in-person gambling because of its greater accessibility and ability to gamble larger amounts of money. Moreover, those still currently online gambling everyday are more likely to be experiencing a very negative impact (on their mental

¹³ Sonnet Advisory & Impact (2021), GAMSTOP: Evaluating the effectiveness of the national online self-exclusion scheme.

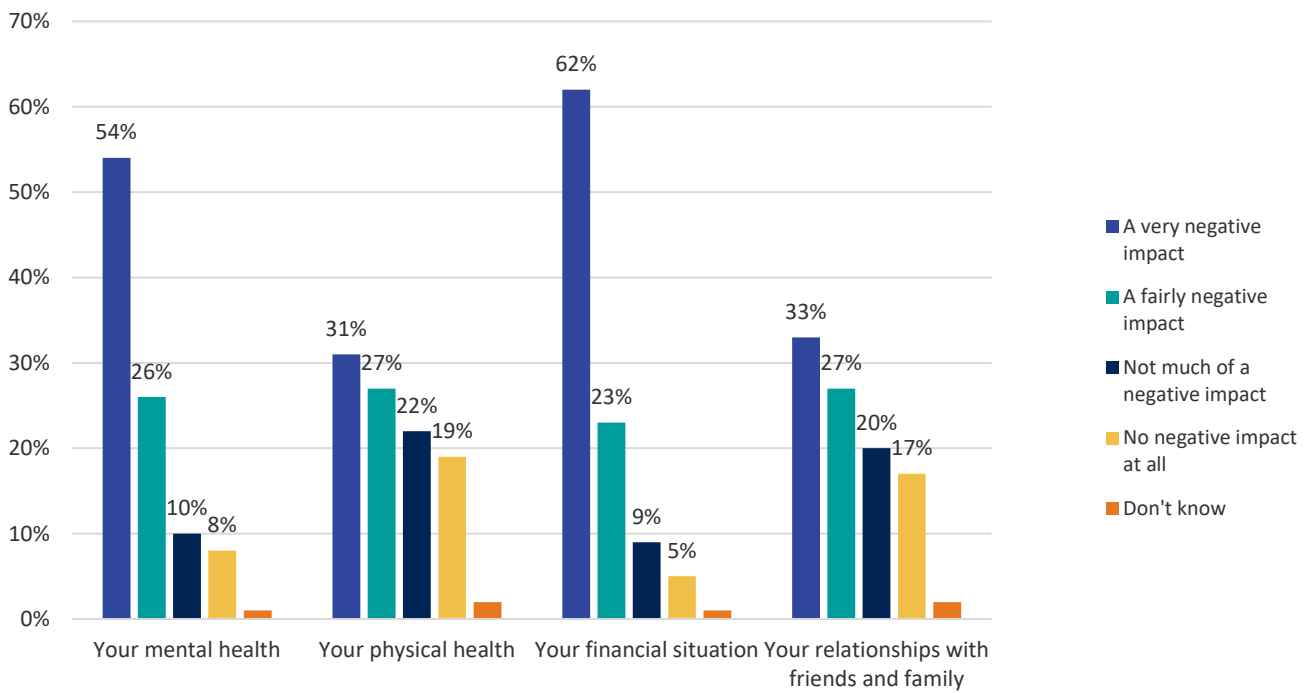
health, physical health, financial situation, and relationships with friends and family) than those gambling less frequently.

- **Exclusion length:** Whilst it appears that the length of exclusion selected influences the changes in harm experienced by users, the wider context of long-term harms is likely to be more important. GAMSTOP users that had registered with a five-year exclusion length were more likely to still be experiencing higher levels of gambling-related harm across all four types. However, these individuals were more likely to be experiencing greater levels of harm prior to registering, indicating that GAMSTOP can contribute to reducing gambling related harms proportionate to the level of harm experienced pre-GAMSTOP. It also indicates that some cases of legacy harm can persist beyond five years. Based on userbase behaviours for selecting an exclusion length, the five-year exclusion is widely considered the most suitable option for reducing extreme cases of gambling-related harm as it provides a more long-term solution.
- **Recency of registration:** Individuals that had registered with GAMSTOP less than six months ago were significantly more likely to currently feel safer from the negative effects of gambling, compared with those that had registered over a year ago. This does not indicate that GAMSTOP has less of an impact over time, but instead could be understood that the service provides immediate reassurance against gambling-related harm within the first few months. Interviews indicated that GAMSTOP acted as a safety net that prevented immediate gambling-related harm, but also allowed individuals to improve (and in some cases rebuild) many aspects of their lives over time.

Types of gambling-related harm

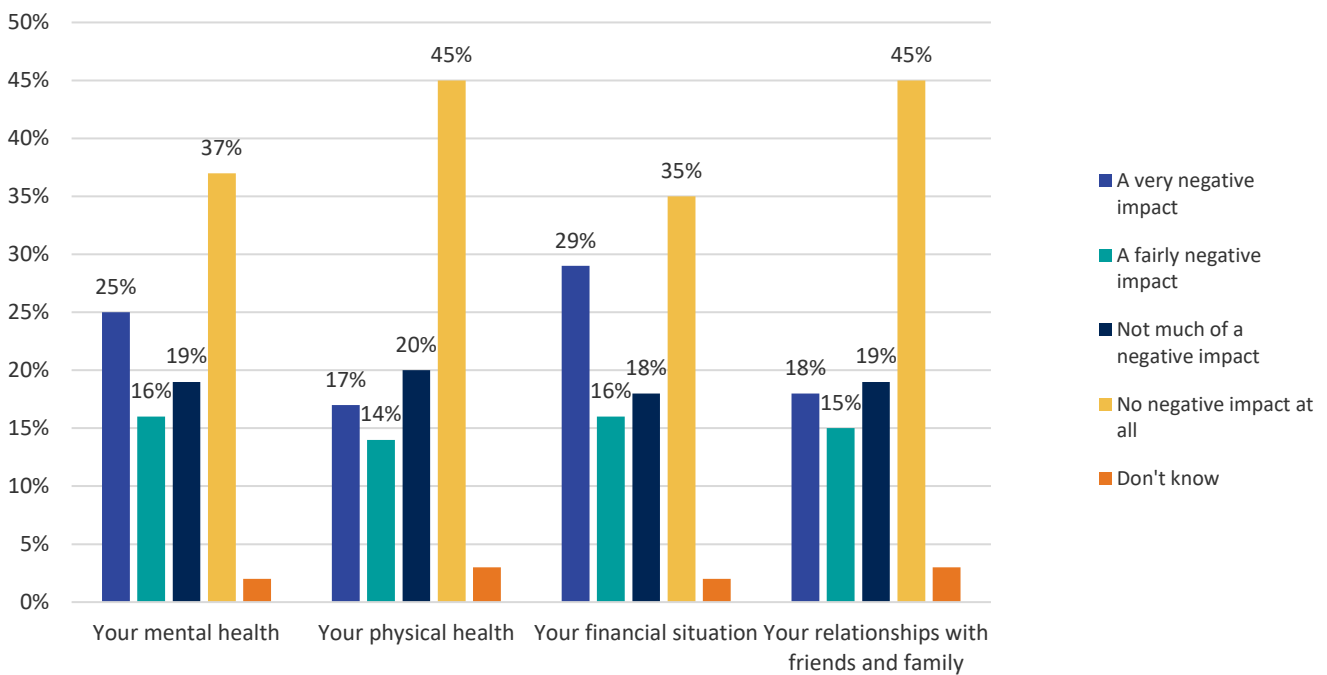
Both the survey and qualitative findings indicate that whilst GAMSTOP contributes to a reduction in all four specified types of gambling related harm, it has varying impact across the different types. Nevertheless, it is apparent that gambling-related harms act within a wider system in which those experiencing one type of harm are also more likely to be experiencing other types of gambling-related harm. Comparison of Figure 5.7 (the levels of gambling-related harm prior to registration) to Figure 5.8 (the current level of gambling-related harm) highlights the consistent reduction across the types of harms relative to pre-GAMSTOP levels.

Figure 5.7: Level of reported gambling-related harm prior to registration to GAMSTOP



Q: Before using GAMSTOP, to what extent, if at all, would you say your gambling habits had a negative impact on...? Base: All who use GAMSTOP to self-exclude from online gambling (n=4213)

Figure 5.8: Level of reported gambling-related harm currently



Q: Based on how you are feeling today, to what extent, if at all, would you say gambling has a negative impact on...? Base: All who use GAMSTOP to self-exclude from online gambling (n=4213)

The impact of gambling on service users' **financial situation** both before GAMSTOP and currently is the most significant (with 45% still negatively impacted) though a significant reduction is apparent. Individuals that still gamble only or mostly online were more likely to experience negative impacts on their financial situation than those that gamble in-person, further validating the established understanding

that online gambling is more harmful than land-based forms.¹⁴ Nevertheless, both this research and the previous evaluation identified a significant decrease in the most extreme cases of financial harm, with interview participants expressing that GAMSTOP enabled them to immediately lower the amount of money they were losing to gambling. This reduction in spending on gambling was apparent amongst individuals that spent smaller amounts, but most notably for participants that had previously spent large amounts through accessing savings, monthly salaries, family money, overdrafts and high-interest loans. Whilst legacy harms of paying off gambling-induced debts was an emerging theme across interviews, GAMSTOP acted as a tool to reduce the short-term financial harms of gambling (e.g. proportion of income spent on gambling) for individuals as well as their close friends and family. This sense of financial liberation GAMSTOP contributed to enables more users to spend their money more intentionally, including more money to treat themselves, eat out at restaurants, and do more activities with family and friends:

“I haven't had any issues with gambling now since the day I signed up which would have been probably 2021, and I have complete financial clarity. We just bought our second house, and obviously having our third child. Hopefully I can keep my dog, but I don't have any issues with my relationships and finances.” – Service user, five-year exclusion, no longer gambles

The impact of gambling on service users' **mental health** both before registering with GAMSTOP and currently also remains high (with 41% of users' mental health still negatively affected by gambling), within the context of a general reduction in harm. This was significantly higher amongst the mid to older age groups (aged 35-64), compared to younger age groups (aged 18-34). Interview participants generally expressed an improvement in their mental health, relating to diagnosed mental health illnesses (e.g. depression, anxiety disorder) alongside broader issues with self-esteem, loneliness and isolation, and the sense of 'guilt' from previous gambling behaviour. Individuals considered GAMSTOP to have improved their mental and **physical health** simultaneously, with examples of service users having the time and disposable income to invest in their health through greater levels of exercise, nutrition, sleep quality, and general mental well-being. Many emphasised that GAMSTOP eased the isolation and stress generated by hiding/denying gambling activity, with some feeling that GAMSTOP embodied the notion that someone 'cared' for their wellbeing. The impact GAMSTOP had on the mental and physical health of service users varied. Some expressed concerns that their mental health (particularly a sense of enduring "guilt") continued to have long-term consequences despite GAMSTOP being an effective preventative for future harm. Others expressed full recovery:

“I've not felt any sort of depression. Obviously I'm medicated at the minute but I've had no other stress in my life. I'm spending my free time that I used to spend while gambling to just, like, sit with my partner and watch a film or go out...” – Service user, five-year exclusion, no longer gambles

GAMSTOP also reduced the negative impacts on service users' relationships with friends and family, often acting as a tool to both reduce gambling but also reassure close friends and family of their commitment to stop. Interviews indicated that GAMSTOP particularly contributed to improvements in relationships between partners/spouses and between parents/children. Many participants expressed that their relationships with friends and family were now improved as they were able to be more present (without the distraction of online gambling) and generally spend more meaningful time with loved ones. However, a third (33%) of survey respondents indicated that they still experience a negative impact on

¹⁴ Sonnet Advisory & Impact (2021), GAMSTOP: Evaluating the effectiveness of the national online self-exclusion scheme.

their relationships. This was significantly higher for male respondents compared to females and also those who indicated they were divorced. One participant's gambling behaviours had previously contributed to the breakdown of a long-term relationship, but since registering with GAMSTOP and stopping gambling they were able to develop healthier relationships:

“Well, that's been the reward. You know, I've actually started to create a life and enjoy things that I'd stopped enjoying. Going out for meals, spending time with friends and family, actually having a social life and activities with those people that I want in my life.” – **Service user, five-year exclusion period, no longer gambles**

Many participants emphasised that GAMSTOP was particularly useful for providing “*peace of mind*” for their partners and family, improving transparency and trust through an active commitment to exclude themselves. Thus, whilst GAMSTOP helps to alleviate the overt strains on relationships (financial pressure, time pressure etc.), it has also acted as a transparency tool to enable service users to maintain trusting and healthy relationships.

“She [Participant's partner] knows the, sort of, journey I've been on, and the effect that it has, and it's caused a lot of dissension between me and her over the years... She still doesn't trust-, you know, if I'm half an hour late home from work, she still doesn't trust that, but there used to be a time where I'd phone up saying, 'Listen, I'm on my way home,' and turn up 2 hours later... So, those things have changed...” – **Service user, five-year exclusion, no longer gambles**

Prevalence of legacy harm

Though GAMSTOP has facilitated a significant reduction in the types of gambling-related harm that individuals are experiencing, legacy harms remain a challenge for many service users. In this context, legacy harms refer to the negative impacts an individual continues to experience from previous gambling behaviours that persist beyond the period of active gambling. Though GAMSTOP reduced gambling-related harm proportionately across the four specified types, GAMSTOP users generally experienced negative impacts on their mental health and financial situation specifically both before and since registering. Almost half (45%) of respondents stated they currently experienced ‘no negative impact at all’ in relation to their physical health or relationships with friends and family. This is in comparison to over a quarter of respondents stating they still experience a ‘very negative impact’ on their mental health (25%) and financial situation (29%) as a result of gambling, since registering with GAMSTOP. Moreover, respondents that ‘no longer gamble at all’ still experience a negative impact on their mental health (40%), physical health (31%), financial situation (43%), and relationships with friends and family (32%). This variation indicates that ‘legacy harm’ amongst GAMSTOP users is more significant for individuals’ mental health and financial situation whether they have reduced or completely stopped gambling (as a result of GAMSTOP). The motivations users had when registering with GAMSTOP also influenced the prevalence of legacy/enduring harms they are currently experiencing, with the majority of those that registered ‘to stop gambling online altogether’ and ‘to regain control over my life’ still experiencing a negative impact across all four types of harm. The negative impact of legacy/enduring harm was lowest amongst users that registered ‘to take a break from online gambling’ and ‘as part of a recovery strategy’.

Whilst GAMSTOP's long-term impact at reducing legacy harm cannot be assessed, some interview participants stated that GAMSTOP has alleviated legacy harm to some extent as it acts as both a physical and psychological barrier for future gambling. Though some GAMSTOP users expressed concerns that they may always experience some form of gambling-related harm, the overlapping aspects of gambling-related harm (e.g. a negative financial situation can have a knock-on effect on relationships,

work, and health) has meant GAMSTOP's impact has the potential to reduce many types of harm over a potentially long period of time:

“My daily day-to-day habits have changed massively [...] My mental health feels more stable, again physically, family wise. If I commit to things now, I don't let people down, I actually stick to what I say I'm going to do. Financially, probably still not fully recovered 6 years later, but God knows how long that's going to take. Yes, positive, my life is just massively improved.” – Service user, five-year exclusion, no longer gambles

Interviews with GAMSTOP users also indicate that most individuals have replaced their gambling activity with healthy and sustainable activities that have further alleviated harm. Some participants emphasised that not only did GAMSTOP enable more free time that was originally spent gambling, but it also helped to create more time that had previously been spent simply thinking/worrying about gambling and in some cases working more hours to make up for gambling losses. Though some participants felt they did not use this additional time in a healthy way (e.g. excessive use of social media, playing online gambling-like games), many felt they had spent this time developing healthier behaviours that helped to alleviate remaining gambling-related harm. These included: exercise (e.g. cold water swimming, yoga), more sleep, time with friends/family, dedicated time for self-care, house renovation/generally improving living spaces, volunteering (e.g. at a local food centre), reading, gardening, art/creative activities, educational classes (e.g. adult numeracy), and an increased focus on work commitments. This secondary impact of GAMSTOP demonstrates the deeper benefits of the self-exclusion scheme, often used in absence of other forms of gambling support.

Affected others

GAMSTOP's service was for individuals to exclude themselves from online gambling, though a small proportion of users have used GAMSTOP to exclude someone else from gambling using their accounts with varying effect. Although GAMSTOP has a positive impact reducing individuals' frequency of gambling and experiences of gambling-related harm, GAMSTOP was less impactful for affected others' experiences (those that signed up to exclude someone else from gambling using their accounts). Across most of the interviews conducted with a range of affected others (n=5), service users felt that GAMSTOP provides them with some reassurance and protection. The additional barrier GAMSTOP provided to affected others (either protecting their own details from being used, or for reducing the ability of their loved one to online gamble) does indicate that GAMSTOP has the potential to reduce gambling-related harm amongst affected others, most notably the impact gambling has on relationships with friends and family. Most of the sample that were interviewed registered once they had already experienced some degree of relationship breakdown and gambling-related harm. However, participants felt that this potential was limited without the individual also 'buying-in' to a commitment to reduce gambling through self-exclusion.

“And he [her partner] knows GAMSTOP. I think he knows there are loopholes, so I think if GAMSTOP was there or not he'd still be able to do it, to be honest.” – Affected other, five-year exclusion, male partner gambles

5.4 Contribution of GAMSTOP

Based on conclusions drawn from the contribution analysis, the reduction in both online gambling and gambling-related harm can be largely attributed to GAMSTOP's self-exclusion. The assessment was informed by both user self-perception and the use of other gambling support services across the userbase. Most GAMSTOP users (60%) do not currently use any other form of gambling support, compared to just over a third (37%) not using other support services prior to signing up to GAMSTOP. This reduction in using other support services strengthens the notion that GAMSTOP is an impactful

support tool for reducing online gambling and gambling-related harm, even when used in isolation. The qualitative findings further substantiate this, as many participants considered GAMSTOP the primary (and often only) service that has reduced their gambling behaviours and its consequences.

Participants emphasised that whilst GAMSTOP has enabled them to control their gambling-habits, this still requires sustained motivation and self-regulation throughout the exclusion period. Individuals registering with a 5-year exclusion period often expressed greater motivation to stop gambling (or significantly reduce over a long period of time), compared to those with a shorter exclusion period seeking a short-term 'break' from gambling. Some individuals felt GAMSTOP was impactful when perceived as a psychological block and a reminder of the commitment they have made.

“I don't think it stopped my gambling activity. What I think it's done is it's helped-, it's good for a mental block. It feels more like a safety blanket [...] I think that this is a great way of stopping. If you have that little, little craving or something comes up and you're interested, it's a good wall. Nothing will ever stop it completely because, you know, we're humans and we have to be trusted to make our own decisions, but I can't see how it could not help anyone.”
– Service user, five-year exclusion, no longer gambles

It can therefore be concluded that the intention behind registering with GAMSTOP influences how effective it is at reducing gambling amongst some individuals. GAMSTOP is less effective at terminating gambling behaviours permanently for individuals that intend to take a short-term break from online gambling (and may continue in-person gambling), compared to individuals that intend to stop online/all forms of gambling entirely. The latter group are more likely to select a five-year duration and may also have extreme gambling behaviours that generate more gambling-related harm for the individual. Further research to explore the impact of GAMSTOP on individuals seeking a short-term break from gambling would provide a greater understanding of the multifaceted ways the service is used to ease gambling behaviours and harms. The distinction this research has highlighted further substantiates the conclusion made in the previous evaluation regarding the intentions to stop gambling or take a 'short break' from it.¹⁵

(ID32) “I think there also needs to be self-determination. It's a tool, a mechanism, it's how a person uses it, in my opinion. I can, you know, attribute it to where I am in my life due to the fact that I don't have the urge and even if I did have the urge, how much of the psychology is the fact I know I can't go on there, as opposed to me telling myself, 'No, I don't need to go there, I'm really strong'. I think it's probably 50/50 because the length of ban you indicate tells you how long you want to stop or if you do want to stop.”
– Service user, five-year exclusion, no longer gambles

These findings therefore validate contribution claim 1 (that GAMSTOP reduces gambling and harm during the exclusion period), and to some extent validates contribution claim 2 (that GAMSTOP better equips users to self-manage their gambling behaviours) for individuals that have sustained self-motivation to reduce gambling behaviours. This is because whilst many users felt that GAMSTOP does not eradicate the “urge” to gamble, it does provide a mostly effective physical barrier to online gambling and also symbolises a commitment to uphold.

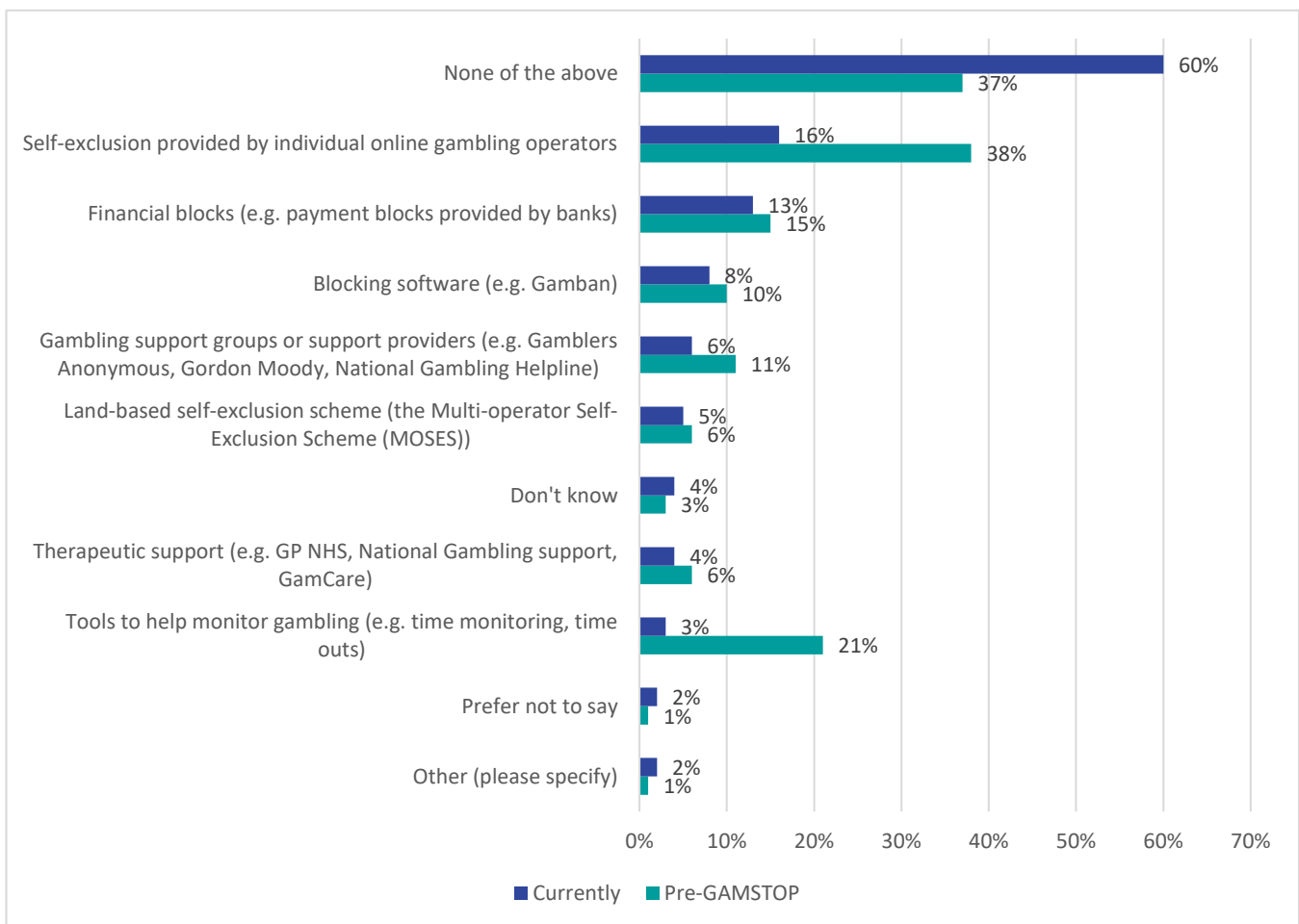
¹⁵ Sonnet Advisory & Impact (2021), GAMSTOP: Evaluating the effectiveness of the national online self-exclusion scheme. (pp. 41-42)

Attributing impact to alternative explanations

Though this chapter has demonstrated the extent of GAMSTOP’s impact, other explanations to help explain and contextualise this impact are worthy of consideration, particularly relating to the use of other gambling support services.

Generally, GAMSTOP users do not use other forms of gambling support consistently, as evident in Figure 5.9. Use of other support reduced once individuals registered with GAMSTOP generally, particularly in the use of self-exclusion schemes provided by individual operators. The most common form of support used alongside GAMSTOP was self-exclusion from individual operators (17%), however the majority of respondents (60%) did not access any other support alongside GAMSTOP.

Figure 5.9: Comparison of other gambling support use pre-GAMSTOP/currently



Q: [i) Before registering with GAMSTOP which of the following, if any, had you ever used for help or other related support for your gambling behaviour? ii) What gambling support, other than GAMSTOP, if any, do you currently use?]. Base: All who use GAMSTOP to self-exclude from online gambling (n=4213)

It is apparent that users often ‘replaced’ individual operator self-exclusions with GAMSTOP, indicating that GAMSTOP is a more effective approach to self-exclusion. Some interview participants also stated this, in which they felt that individual site exclusions and Gamban were ineffective as you could simply use another operator or device to gamble:

“I have done self-exclusions before I used the final GAMSTOP. I did quite a few self-exclusions, to be fair. And then because I was finding that I was then self-excluding but then the next week I'd be joining another site, I thought, 'Well, let me try GAMSTOP and see how it works,' and then I was quite surprised that it did actually [...] block you from quite a lot of sites, so that really did help.” – Service user, five-year exclusion, still gambles online

Use of informal support was similar, with just over a third currently accessing informal support (35%) (most commonly ‘lifestyle changes’ and ‘support from friends and family’). Moreover, individuals with a 5-year exclusion period accessed both formal and informal support more than other exclusion lengths, explained by the higher levels of gambling-related harm they experience and possibly their more long-term (and transparent) commitment to reduce gambling behaviours. Generally, those using additional support in conjunction with GAMSTOP are less likely to be experiencing a negative impact from gambling-related harm and those only using GAMSTOP are more likely to be experiencing no gambling-related harm. This indicates that individuals using GAMSTOP in conjunction with other support provision may be facing more extreme cases of gambling-related and legacy harms.

Therefore, whilst GAMSTOP sits within a wider system of gambling prevention and support, many users do not access other support and much of the impact can be attributed to GAMSTOP. Nevertheless, an individual’s self-motivation to reduce gambling activity is an important contributor to GAMSTOP’s effectiveness. Individuals that are committed to registering with GAMSTOP to begin with and do not engage with the potential ‘loopholes’ (e.g. illegal/unlicensed operators, land-based gambling) often have an existing motivation to change gambling behaviours. This underlying motivation does not counter GAMSTOP’s impact but instead enhances it, as individuals that are seeking to significantly change their gambling habits deeply value GAMSTOP as a long-term tool for self-management and accountability.

Case Study

Daniel

Service user
1 year exclusion
Registered within last 5 years
Male, mixed race, 55+



“It’s [GAMSTOP] stopped me completely. Because people can’t babysit you all day to check what you’re doing, especially online.”

Daniel is in his 50s and lives with his wife and three children. Daniel has been diagnosed with ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) and has struggled with addiction for much of his adult life. Daniel has been in recovery from drugs for over 20 years. Daniel’s ADHD and neurodivergent behaviours have made him more susceptible to having addictive behaviours. From an early age, the sensory experience (e.g. sounds, rhythms, visuals) of arcades and gambling machines has engaged Daniel. More recently Daniel began buying online scratch cards. Pressure from work and family problems meant he began to gamble everyday, all through the night. Daniel was tired all the time and was unable to be present at work or in social situations. He was often distracted by imagining online spinning machines and the potential of winning.

Daniel’s online gambling became increasingly secretive, hiding his phone and deleting evidence of gambling. It became very challenging and emotionally burdensome to hide the gambling, especially when he was losing large amounts of money. Daniel had recognised the issue and tried to use addiction management techniques to stop. As he continued to lose more money, Daniel’s wife became aware of his gambling. Daniel decided to register with GAMSTOP, having previously seen it on an advert.

Since registering with GAMSTOP, Daniel has stopped gambling. Daniel considers GAMSTOP the most important aspect of his recovery, but he also manages his gambling through reading self-help books, attending Gambler's Anonymous, and continuing to follow the 12 Step Programme. Daniel has been able to undo much of the damage caused by gambling and he is transparent with his wife during this journey. Daniel plans to reinstate the GAMSTOP exclusion when it expires to prevent any future gambling.

“ I used to think addiction was all separate entities, but it's not, it's just one thing. It's like a whack-a-mole, you think you've got one thing down and then another one pops up.”

6 Demographics of GAMSTOP users

Key findings

- The majority of respondents in our survey indicated they identified as male (66%), compared to 34% that identified as female.
- The vast majority of respondents (around 90%) were of White ethnic background, with considerably smaller proportions indicating they were from Asian (2%), Mixed (2%) or Black (1%) ethnic background. These findings are notably different to the ethnic makeup of the UK, with White respondents being overrepresented.
- In general, the demographic findings of this survey broadly align with that of the previous survey conducted and the registration data held by GAMSTOP.
- There was significant variation within a range of different demographic factors including region, working status, employment and relationship status.

6.1 Demographics of GAMSTOP users

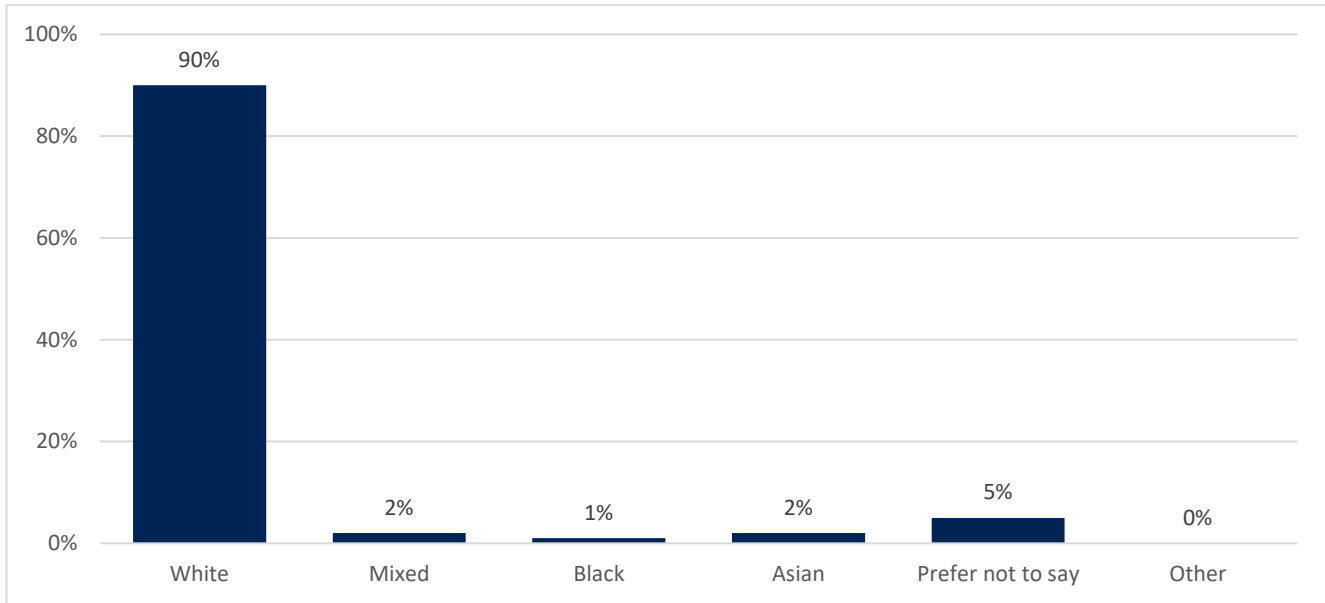
In this section, we delve into the demographic characteristics of GAMSTOP users, examining various aspects such as age, gender, ethnicity, income, and number of children. Our analysis draws on data from multiple sources, including the recent Ipsos Survey, the previous GAMSTOP survey conducted in 2021, and the data collected by GAMSTOP from registration information (Monitoring Information (MI)). By comparing these datasets, we aim to provide a comprehensive overview of how GAMSTOP users align with, or differ, from broader demographic trends.

Age, Gender, and Ethnicity

The majority of respondents in our survey indicated they identified as male (66%), compared to 34% that identified as female. This approximately aligns with the demographics captured in GAMSTOP registration details, showing that 70% of users identify as male and 30% as women. It also aligns against the previous survey undertaken, which found that 71% of GAMSTOP users identified as male and 28% identified as female.

In terms of ethnicity, our survey found the vast majority (around 90%) were of White ethnic background, with considerably smaller proportions indicating they were from Asian (2%), Mixed (2%) or Black (1%) ethnic background. This is largely in line with the findings of the previous survey, which found that 89% of respondents were of white ethnic background. This could indicate that the ethnic breakdown of GAMSTOP users has remained relatively stable over the period between the two evaluations.

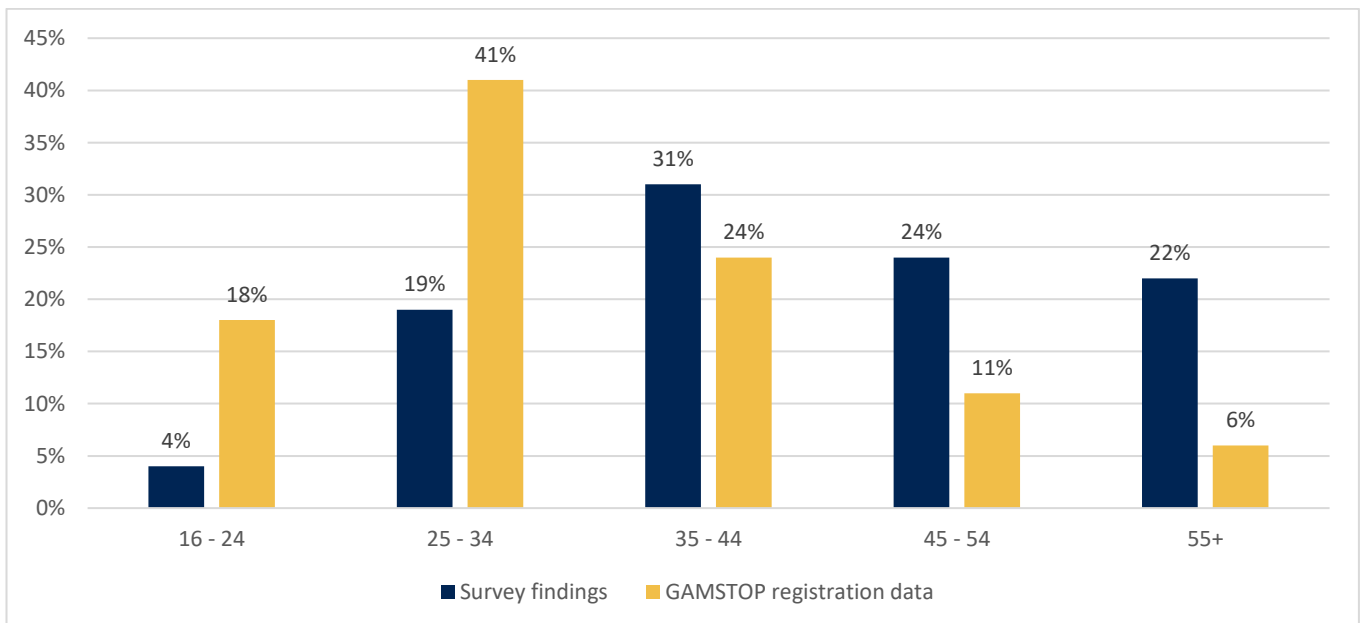
Figure 6.1: Ethnicity of survey respondents



Q: What is your ethnic group? Base: n = 4651

One key demographic factor that differed in our survey compared to the previous survey and registration data held by GAMSTOP was age. Figure 6.2 below shows the proportion of respondents within each age cohort for both the Ipsos survey and the previous GAMSTOP survey. It shows that the sample for our survey included respondents from older age groups compared to the previous GAMSTOP survey and GAMSTOP registration data (Figure 6.2). For example, 22% of respondents in the survey conducted for this evaluation indicated they were aged 55 or older, compared to 6% of all GAMSTOP users registered. This may indicate that the extent to which our survey is representative of the population of GAMSTOP users is limited. A full breakdown of the extent to which this may have led to bias in our findings is provided within the technical annex.

Figure 6.2: Age breakdown of survey respondents



Ipsos Survey: Base: n = 4651. GAMSTOP Registration Data: N = 475,055.

Wider demographic factors

In addition to the previous demographic areas examined, the survey also captured a number of other key demographics. This includes:

- **Region:** There was a significant geographic spread of users across the UK, with the largest number within the North West (15%), South East (12%) and Yorkshire and Humber (10%). Across the devolved regions, a total of 83% lived within England, 10% in Scotland, 5% in Wales and 3% in Northern Ireland. Whilst this is largely consistent with the total regional population (and devolved nation population) of the UK, a smaller proportion of individuals in our sample (6%), were from Greater London compared to the total population (13%)¹⁶.
- **Income:** There was no clear trend in GAMSTOP users across income level, with the sample including participants from a range of different income levels. The largest proportion (21%) indicated their households' annual income fell within the £55,000 to £99,000 band, followed by 13% within the £25,000-£34,999 band and 11% within £35,000 to £44,999. In total, 74% of the sample had a combined annual household income above £15,000.
- **Education:** The highest education level reached with the largest proportion of respondents (26%) was GCSE level, followed by 13% having completed a Bachelor's degree level education and 10% having completed NVQ Level 3. This was followed by 9% of respondents having completed A-level/AS-level education, 9% having completed NVQ level 1, NVQ level 2, 8% having completed primary school or secondary school.
- **Relationship status:** The largest proportion of respondents were single (30%), followed by those who were married (28%), and 24% living together but not married. 10% of respondents were in a relationship but not living together, 5% were divorced and 2% widowed.
- **Working status:** A total of 76% were in work (60% in full time employment, 8% in part-time employment and 8% self-employed). This was followed by 9% who were either permanently sick or disabled, 5% that were retired, 2% that were full-time carers and 2% that were unemployed.
- **Number of children in household:** The majority of survey respondents (61%) indicated that they had no children living in the household, followed by nearly equal proportions for one (18%) and two (14%) children living in the household.
- **Disability:** The majority of respondents (59%) indicated that they had no long-standing physical or mental impairment, illness or disability, compared to 32% that indicated they did.

A full overview of the charts for all demographic factors examined in the survey can be found in the technical annex.

¹⁶ Statista (2022). Population of the United Kingdom in 2022, by region. Source: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/294729/uk-population-by-region/>

Case study

Zach

Service user
1 year and five-year exclusions
registered 4 years ago
Male, 35-44, White



“I think at that stage, rather than going for the 1 year one I decided to go for the 5 year one just because it was a bit like- ‘Right, that’s it’- it just makes you stop doing it.”

Zach is in his 30s and lives with his long-term partner. When Zach was at university, he began placing small online bets on football matches and this continued into his early twenties. As he began working full-time as a teacher, he had more of a disposable income for online gambling. The amount of money and time spent online gambling slowly increased, and Zach would sometimes use individual gambling operator exclusions to provide short weekly or fortnightly breaks. Zach considered gambling on football matches a hobby of his, and he’d use the gambling apps to watch the game and followed tipsters on social media for their recommended stakes.

By 2018, Zach was gambling every day for several hours each evening, and did not tell his partner at the time. Having lost significant amounts of money over a few days, Zach realised he was unable to ‘chase his losses’ and signed up to GAMSTOP with a one-year exclusion. He also received online support from GamCare. GAMSTOP allowed Zach to manage his online gambling, but 13 months later he separated from his long-term partner and removed his exclusion seeking a distraction. Zach’s online gambling resumed for some time, and he began betting on foreign football matches during the pandemic. As he began to lose more money, in 2020 Zach decided to put another GAMSTOP exclusion in place. This time, he selected a 5-year exclusion.

GAMSTOP helped Zach to stop online gambling, but he soon began going to bookmakers to bet on the football. Zach had not been to a bookmaker prior to this. It was harder to gamble large amounts of money in-person at first, but his gambling continued and by 2023 he was going every day and experiencing significant financial losses. Zach began to worry that his employer would find out and wanted to protect what remained of his and his new partner’s savings. In early 2024, Zach decided to stop all gambling. He has since been able to control the urges to gamble in-person and receives support from his partner and a close friend. This is still a challenge for Zach, especially during periods of highly publicised football matches and when he is exposed to gambling advertisement. Zach has not gambled for 3 months and considers both his mental commitment against gambling and the GAMSTOP exclusion as crucial for his recovery journey so far.

“Online you were just putting a number into your online account, so it didn’t matter if it was £10, £20, £100, £200, that amount because you didn’t have the cash and you didn’t see it. It didn’t feel like it was real money, almost. So, having GAMSTOP, not being able to use online accounts made a big difference because I do feel like I could have quite easily spiralled”

7 Conclusion

This report has outlined the evaluation's findings, focusing on GAMSTOP's users, user experience, and impact at reducing online gambling and gambling-related harm. The headline findings provide an overarching insight into who is using GAMSTOP, and how this has influenced their gambling and recovery journey.

7.1 Conclusions

Users of GAMSTOP

GAMSTOP users largely align with the previous survey conducted, though there are emerging variations in relation to age group and other demographic factors.

- **Demographics:** Most respondents in our survey indicated they identified as male, compared to just over a third that identified as female. The vast majority of respondents were of White ethnic background, with considerably smaller proportions indicating they were from Asian, Mixed or Black ethnic background. There was significant variation within a range of different demographic factors including region, working status, employment and relationship status. In general, the demographic findings of this survey broadly align with that of the previous survey conducted and the registration data held by GAMSTOP.
- **Motivations for registering:** The vast majority of those that use GAMSTOP, do so to exclude themselves from accessing online gambling. However, a much small proportion of respondents indicated that they were an affected other: excluding a friend, family member or someone they know from online gambling using their account. The majority of respondents opted for a five-year exclusion, compared to those on a one-year exclusion and a six-month exclusion.

User experience of GAMSTOP

GAMSTOP users' experience of the service was largely positive, though those seeking a long-term exclusion from gambling expressed concerns about their minimum exclusion period ending.

- **Registering with GAMSTOP:** The most common reason for registering with GAMSTOP was to stop gambling online altogether, followed by a way to regain control over their life and to spend less money on gambling. Our survey found that the most common way that people heard about GAMSTOP was through gambling websites, followed by online searches, word-of-mouth, and social media. The evidence from across the survey and interviews indicates that the majority of GAMSTOP users have a positive experience in registering to GAMSTOP, with service users largely considering registration to be a very straightforward, smooth and easy to complete process.
- **Satisfaction levels:** The majority of GAMSTOP users are satisfied with the service provided, however this is dependent on a number of key factors including whether they were still gambling, the harms they experienced prior to registration, the harms they experience currently, and whether they were an affected other. One key improvement outlined in interviews was to provide the option of a longer or lifetime exclusion period as this would provide greater "peace of mind" for those who use GAMSTOP to stop gambling online altogether. Whilst respondents were largely content with the current level of communication provided by GAMSTOP, a key theme

emerging from the interviews was stress related to uncertainty around what would happen at the end of their minimum exclusion period.

Impact of GAMSTOP

GAMSTOP has had a positive impact on users' online gambling activity and experiences of gambling-related harm. These impacts are further enabled when individuals have an existing and sustained commitment to change their gambling behaviours.

- **Gambling behaviour:** The frequency and amount of gambling was reduced under GAMSTOP, with almost half of respondents no longer gambling at all. There has been an overall reduction in gambling behaviours as users have not replaced previous online gambling activity with in-person gambling to the same extent. Some users are aware of and have engaged with unlicensed/illegal gambling operators since registering with GAMSTOP. Of respondents that indicated they still gamble online, over a third use unlicensed/illegal gambling operators that are not covered by GAMSTOP.
- **Gambling-related harms:** Users' experiences of gambling-related harm was significantly reduced under GAMSTOP. This reduction was proportional to each type of harm, though current levels of harm was lowest on 'physical health' and 'relationships with friends and family'. Legacy harm was still present for many, however, particularly in regard to users' mental health and financial situation. In relation to Affected Others, this group also experienced persistent gambling-related harm, most notably if the individual had not reduced their gambling behaviours or engaged with GAMSTOP.
- **Contribution of GAMSTOP:** Our analysis found that GAMSTOP was a key contributor to the reduction in both the frequency of gambling and the amount of gambling-related harm experienced, with interview participants largely attributing the changes they experienced to GAMSTOP. The evaluation also found that the majority of GAMSTOP users use GAMSTOP as their sole form of gambling support. However, we found that people were most likely to experience a reduction in gambling (and subsequently gambling-related harm) if GAMSTOP is coupled with a sustained personal commitment to stop gambling. This is also enabled by the environment in which the person is, including the role of friends, family members and other members of their support network.

Therefore, this evaluation has identified that GAMSTOP is an effective tool for reducing gambling-related harm for individuals seeking to exclude themselves from online gambling operators. Though there is variation in the reasons individuals register with GAMSTOP and the exclusion length they select, the service provided is widely considered both satisfactory and impactful. This is most significant for individuals with a sustained commitment to reducing their gambling behaviours, seeking a lifestyle change rather than a break.

7.2 Recommendations

For GAMSTOP

Based on the findings of this evaluation, we propose the following key recommendations for the onward delivery of GAMSTOP:

1. **Exclusion length:** GAMSTOP users would like to have the option of longer exclusion lengths to provide greater "peace of mind" in their decision to no longer access online gambling. Whilst we

acknowledge the issues associated with providing a lifetime exclusion length, we propose that a service users could benefit from the offering of either a 10-year or 15-year exclusion.

- 2. Communication:** Whilst the majority of respondents indicated that the current level of communication is correct, interviews indicated that there is concern around the processes in place following the end of users' minimum exclusion period. Therefore, there could be a benefit to providing greater information, perhaps as a message or email soon after registration, that provides information to service users on the processes following the end of their minimum exclusion period. This communication could also be tailored based on the exclusion length, with those on a five-year exclusion (who, we found in our survey, to be more likely to have experienced gambling-related harm prior to registration, and more likely to use GAMSTOP to stop gambling altogether) to receive an increased level of marketing compared to those on a six-month exclusion (who, we found in our survey, to be more likely to have registered to have taken a break from gambling). This could also include a greater amount of signposting to other support available.
- 3. Continued promotion across varied media:** Our evaluation found that young people and affected others were more likely to hear about GAMSTOP through social media and word-of-mouth communication. Therefore, GAMSTOP should continue to advertise through social media platforms. This could have a continued focus on lived experience case studies, which may have greater power in generating word-of-mouth discussion from both affected others and those with previous experience. Promoting across a wide range of media could also be beneficial for continuing to encourage registration from a wide diversity of individuals, including those from an ethnic minority background, those with a disability and a range of family backgrounds.

For wider stakeholders

In addition, we also suggest the following key recommendations for wider stakeholders, including government departments and arms-length bodies, that would facilitate GAMSTOP to further achieve its' core aims, including reducing or preventing gambling-related harm:

- 4. Addressing the issue of illegal gambling:** a key issue affecting GAMSTOP's effectiveness in reducing online gambling is the prevalence of illegal or black-market gambling websites. Therefore, there needs to be increased regulation from government, the gambling commission and wider regulatory stakeholders to limit the prevalence and availability of these websites for use within the UK. In addition, this also includes working alongside social media platforms and search engine providers to provide greater regulation of the targeted advertising practices of illegal gambling operators to GAMSTOP users.
- 5. Greater collaboration within support networks:** Our evaluation found that whilst a significant proportion of GAMSTOP users do not use other gambling support, taking a layered approach to gambling support can be an important aspect of recovery for individuals experiencing legacy harm or ongoing gambling-related harm. Therefore, there could be a benefit to improving the links between support providers within the Gambling support sector, creating a network of support for users as opposed to stand alone offerings.

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