

Improving Health Worldwide

# Trends in children's gambling 2011-2017

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**Heather Wardle**

Heather.Wardle@lshtm.ac.uk

**Background:** In Britain, gambling has an ambiguous place in the lives of children. For the most part, children are legally prohibited from taking part in many forms of commercial gambling. Age restrictions range from 16 and over for National Lottery products, including scratchcards, the football pools and society lotteries whereas age restrictions are 18 and over for all other forms of commercial gambling. The exception to this is category D machines, those with stakes and prizes of 10p and £5 (if paid out in money rather than prizes) which anyone of any age is legally allowed to play and, of course, there are no legal restrictions on what happens between friends and families. Facsimile gambling products, for example in the form of games played for virtual currency, are also freely available to children.

Since 2007, advertisements for gambling have been more freely permitted and whilst there are attempts to minimise children's exposure to gambling advertisements and marketing, evidence suggests this has not been successful (Ofcom, 2013).

Gambling is a public health issue, with an estimated 400,000 adults being problem gamblers (Connolly et al, 2017). It is important to consider the gambling behaviour of children for two main reasons. First, that the children themselves may experience harms from their engagement in gambling and second, to better understand the antecedents of gambling behaviour among the next generation of young adults.

This short briefing paper uses data collected by the Gambling Commission (GC) from 2011 to 2017 (GC, 2017) to explore changes in gambling behaviours of children aged 11-15.

These studies, using broadly the same methods, have routinely asked about gambling behaviour in the past week and, since 2014, collected information about gambling problems. In 2008/9 and 2005, bespoke studies of the gambling behaviour among children in school years 8 and 10 were carried out. Comparisons are not made with these earlier studies as there is considerable variance in their methodologies, which can affect results.

## Gambling in the past seven days

Since 2011 there has been a significant fall in the proportion of 11-15 year olds gambling in the past week, falling from 23% in 2011 to 12% in 2017. As Figure 1 shows, this decline largely occurred between 2011 and 2013 (falling from 23% to 16%) and then between 2016 and 2017 (falling from 16% to 12%). It remains to be seen whether the new low of 12% in 2017 is the start of new consistently lower pattern or a temporary aberration. The trend is the same for both boys and girls, although boys routinely have higher rates of past week gambling than girls (see Figure 1).

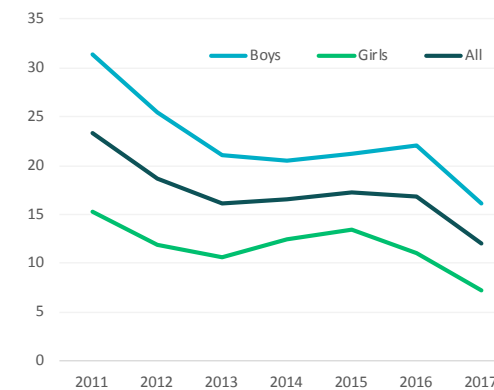


Figure 1: trends in past week participation in gambling, 2011-2017

This trend is also the same for all age groups. A broadly consistent pattern across most survey years is that gambling in the past week is just as popular among 11 year olds as 15 year olds. This makes gambling unique when compared with other risk behaviours, like smoking or drinking, which typically increase with age.

Reductions in participation were seen for most, though not all, gambling activities. For example, the proportion of children purchasing any National Lottery product fell from 11% in 2011 to 4% in 2017 and private betting and gambling fell from 12% in 2011 to 5%.

These reductions account for most of the change in children’s past week gambling behaviour, mainly because engagement in other gambling activities were much less popular to start with or because they remained as popular in 2017 as 2011.

This latter trend was the case for fruit machines, other machines and online gambling. These were the only activities in which rates of participation did not change significantly between 2011 and 2017. The net effect was that by 2017 gambling on fruit machines was, along with private betting, the most prevalent form of gambling activity among 11-15 year olds (see Figure 2).

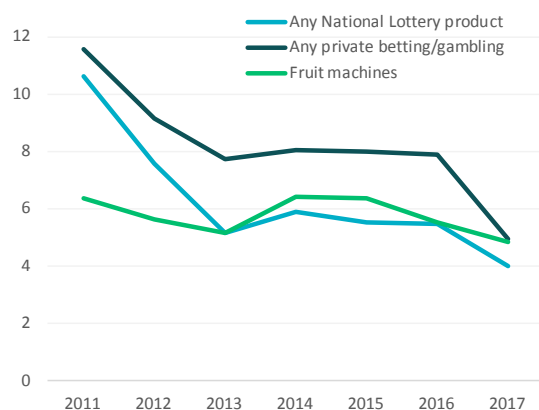


Figure 2: Trends in past week participation for select activities, 2011-17

Looking at trends in participation among past week gamblers shows this pattern more starkly. Among past week gamblers, participation in most activities either declined or remained reasonably consistent. The one exception was fruit machines, where participation among past week gamblers increased from 23% in 2011 to 40% in 2017. Because of changes in engagement of other types of gambling, those gambling in the past week were now much more likely to have played machines than previously. It is also notable, that despite a modest decrease, over half (51%) of past week gamblers in 2017 gambled on activities which they were not supposed to be able to access because of their age and 12% had gambled online. This too has been broadly consistent since 2011.

Many of those who gambled in the past week took part in more than one activity: two on average, a figure consistent since 2011. There was a notable minority of 11-15 year olds who reported very heavy engagement in gambling, taking part in four or more activities in the past week: in 2017, 17% of past week gamblers took part in four or more different activities.

The activities asked about can be grouped into two types – private gambling and commercial gambling. Past week gamblers can either do one or the other, or both. Trend data shows that the vast majority of past week gamblers have consistently gambled on some form of commercial activity (70% in 2017), with about half of past week gamblers only gambling on commercial forms of gambling. In 2017, as in previous years, commercial gambling makes up the vast majority of gambling activity among those aged 11-15.

### Problem gambling

Finally, problem gambling has been measured since 2014. Estimates have been similar in each survey year, being 0.7% in 2014 and 0.9% in 2017. A further 1.3% of children aged 11-15 in 2017 were considered at risk gamblers; a figure broadly consistent since 2014.

Boys have consistently higher rates of problem gambling than girls; 1.7% for boys in 2017 vs 0.3% for girls in 2017. However, rates of problem gambling have not varied by age group. With the exception of 2017 (which may well be an aberration), rates of problem gambling have tended to be similar among those aged 11-13 and those aged 14-15. This too, in the context of other risk behaviours, is unusual.

## Conclusions

- Patterns of past week gambling do appear to be changing. Private gambling and gambling on National Lottery products are not as prevalent as they once were.
- Gambling on fruit machines has retained its popularity and, in the face of declining interest (or perhaps access) to other forms of gambling, gambling on fruit machines now makes up an increasingly high proportion of gambling activity among 11-15 year olds.
- Over half of past week gamblers gamble on an age-restricted form of activity, though it is likely that parents, friends and relatives are helping facilitate this, in some cases. Gambling on commercial activities has been and remains the most prevalent form of gambling.
- Problem gambling rates appear stable, with 2017 data estimating that around 31,000 children aged 11-15 are problem gamblers. We should not be complacent about this; any problem gambling among this group is too much. Furthermore, a greater number than this may be experiencing harms from their gambling.
- Declining rates of past week gambling participation combined with stable rates of problem gambling suggests that those who do gamble may be experiencing greater problems than previously. This is plausible though the GC studies are not able to assess this because of small sample sizes.

## References & Notes

1. All analyses are based on the annual data collected for the Gambling Commission by Ipsos MORI through their young person's omnibus. Around 2,500 children in school years 7 to 11 are interviewed each year. See GC, 2017 for further details.
2. Datasets for 2011 – 2017 were combined for these analyses, with data checked and cleaned to ensure accuracy and consistency of coding between survey years.
3. Analysis in this paper is restricted to those aged 11-15 as this is the group who are not legally allowed to gamble, except on Category D machines and private gambling.
4. In 2017, data collection included schools in Scotland for the first time. These data are omitted and analyses are based on England and Wales only.
5. All analyses have been weighted and the clustered sample design taken into account.
6. Estimates for problem gambling between 2014 and 2016 presented in this report differ to those previously published because previously published estimates i) did not apply the survey weights, ii) only focused on those aged 12-15 and iii) contained some inaccuracies in coding which have been amended for this paper.

Connelly, A. et al (2017) *Gambling behaviour in Great Britain in 2015. Evidence from England, Scotland and Wales*. Birmingham: Gambling Commission.

Gambling Commission (2017) *Young people and gambling 2017. A research study among 11-16 year olds in Great Britain*. Birmingham: Gambling Commission.

Ofcom (2013) Trends in advertising activity – gambling. Available at: [https://www.ofcom.org.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0026/53387/trends\\_in\\_ad\\_activity\\_gambling.pdf](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0026/53387/trends_in_ad_activity_gambling.pdf). Accessed 18.01.2018

Annex: Tables

Table 1: Past week gambling among 11-15 year olds, by age and sex							
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Sex</b>							
Boys	31	25	21	21	21	22	16
Girls	15	12	11	13	13	11	7
All	23	19	16	17	17	17	12
<b>Age</b>							
11	19	17	16	19	20	24	8
12	26	20	15	16	16	15	13
13	24	18	16	16	17	15	13
14	26	18	17	17	17	19	13
15	21	20	18	16	18	14	11
<b>Bases</b>							
<i>Weighted</i>							
Boys	1128	1154	1070	1226	1104	1107	1075
Girls	1262	1260	1133	1201	1101	1207	1188
All							
11 yr olds	264	263	241	236	222	271	236
12 yr olds	528	523	470	572	480	555	570
13 yr olds	594	592	478	580	478	526	523
14 yr olds	576	599	543	561	550	516	554
15 yr olds	446	447	497	495	485	446	415
<i>Unweighted</i>							
Boys	1199	1208	1092	1210	1093	1151	1113
Girls	1191	1209	1059	1169	1063	1061	1130
All							
11 yr olds	487	477	230	220	214	248	199
12 yr olds	489	504	480	523	463	501	534
13 yr olds	498	489	504	555	467	485	541
14 yr olds	505	494	493	569	515	465	528
15 yr olds	429	463	471	529	508	514	477

\*P<0.01; interaction term p>0.29 meaning the patterns for boys and girls and each age group by survey year are similar.

Table 2: Past week gambling among 11-15 year olds, by activity							
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Gambling activity</b>							
Tickets for National Lottery Draw**	6	5	3	3	4	3	2
Scratchcards**	7	4	3	4	4	4	3
National Lottery instant win games (online)**	2	2	1	1	1	1	1
Other National Lottery games (thunderball, Euromillions etc)**	2	1	1	1	1	1	1
Other lotteries**	3	2	1	0	1	0	0
Fruit machines	6	6	5	6	6	6	5
Machines in bookmakers**	n/a	2	1	1	1	1	1
Other machines	n/a	n/a	2	2	3	1	2
Betting at a bookmakers**	3	2	1	2	2	1	1
Bingo at a club*	2	3	2	2	3	2	2
Casino in person**	2	0	1	1	1	0	1
Online gambling (not National Lottery instants)	2	2	1	1	2	1	1
Betting privately with friends/family**	8	5	5	5	6	5	3
Gambling on cards/games with family/friends**	6	6	5	4	5	4	3
Other gambling**	3	2	2	2	3	2	1
<b>Summaries</b>							
Any age-restricted commercial gambling***	14	11	8	9	9	8	6
Any gambling on National Lottery products**	11	8	5	6	6	5	4
Any online gambling	3	2	2	2	2	2	1
Any private betting**	12	9	8	8	8	8	5
Any machines^^	n/a	6	6	7	7	6	5
<b>Bases</b>							
<i>Weighted</i>	2408	2427	2177	2396	2166	2212	2278
<i>Unweighted</i>	2408	2424	2229	2444	2215	2314	2298

\*This includes gambling on all commercial forms of activity, excluding fruit machines as we do not know if children were gambling on machines that they are legally entitled to use.

^^ This is presented from 2012 onwards where data was collected about fruit machines and machines in bookmakers separately. In 2013, a further category of 'other machines' was added.

\*\*p<0.01; \*p<0.05

**Table 3: Past week gambling activity among past week gamblers aged 11-15, by survey**

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Gambling activity</b>							
Tickets for National Lottery Draw**	25	25	17	16	21	18	16
Scratchcards**	32	21	20	22	22	25	23
National Lottery instant win games (online)	8	7	4	4	7	6	6
Other National Lottery games (thunderball, Euromillions etc)	9	10	4	5	7	7	6
Other lotteries**	12	8	4	3	4	3	3
Fruit machines*	27	30	32	39	37	33	40
Machines in bookmakers*	n/a	11	5	5	5	5	6
Other machines	n/a	n/a	11	13	15	9	14
Betting at a bookmakers	11	9	8	9	10	7	8
Bingo at a club	10	15	11	12	19	14	13
Casino in person*	8	3	4	4	3	3	5
Online gambling (not National Lottery instants)	8	9	9	8	9	7	9
Betting privately with friends/family	35	28	29	32	34	32	28
Gambling on cards/games with family/friends*	27	34	29	26	27	24	22
Other gambling	13	13	10	10	16	10	11
<b>Summaries</b>							
Any age-restricted commercial gambling**	62	59	51	52	49	48	51
Any gambling on National Lottery products*	46	41	32	36	32	33	34
Any online gambling	13	12	12	10	13	11	12
Any private betting	49	49	48	49	46	47	41
Mean number of activities undertaken in past 7 days	2.2	2.3	1.9	2.3	2.4	2	2.2
Standard error of mean	0.08	0.14	0.09	0.21	0.14	0.11	0.13
Number of gambling activities undertaken in past 7 days							
1	49	55	61	55	53	61	54
2	25	21	20	21	21	18	21
3	13	8	7	11	9	8	7
4 or more	13	16	13	13	17	12	17
<b>Bases</b>							
Weighted	563	453	352	397	375	371	273
Unweighted	566	454	357	404	399	372	273

^This includes gambling on all commercial forms of activity, excluding fruit machines as we do not know if children were gambling on machines that they are legally entitled to use.

\*\*p<0.01; \*p<0.05

**Table 4: Types of gambling among past week gamblers aged 11-15**

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Gambling activity</b>							
Private gambling only	24	26	24	24	20	27	16
Private gambling and commercial gambling	19	15	18	19	19	17	20
Commercial gambling only	44	46	47	46	45	46	50
Other gambling activity - type unknown	13	13	10	10	16	10	14
<b>Bases</b>							
Weighted	563	453	352	397	375	371	273
Unweighted	566	454	357	404	399	372	273

Table 5: Problem gambling among 11-15 year olds, by sex and survey year				
	2014	2015	2016	2017
<b>Boys</b>				
Non gambler/non-problem gambler (DSM score 0)	92.4	93.8	93.5	94.2
DSM score 1	4.1	3.3	3.4	2.5
DSM score 2-3	2.4	1.9	2.1	1.6
Problem gambler (DSM score 4 or more)	1.1	1.1	0.9	1.7
<b>Girls</b>				
Non gambler/non-problem gambler (DSM score 0)	97.6	96.9	97.1	97.7
DSM score 1	1.2	1.7	1.1	1.2
DSM score 2-3	0.9	1.2	1.5	0.8
Problem gambler (DSM score 4 or more)	0.3	0.2	0.3	0.3
<b>All</b>				
Non gambler/non-problem gambler (DSM score 0)	94.9	95.2	95.3	95.6
DSM score 1	2.7	2.6	2.3	2.1
DSM score 2-3	1.6	1.6	1.8	1.3
Problem gambler (DSM score 4 or more)	0.7	0.6	0.6	0.9
<b>Bases</b>				
<i>Weighted</i>				
<i>Boys</i>	1231	1097	1183	1129
<i>Girls</i>	1193	1069	1092	1140
<i>All</i>	2443	2176	2275	2306
<i>Unweighted</i>				
<i>Boys</i>	1247	1110	1139	1092
<i>Girls</i>	1224	1106	1237	1198
<i>All</i>	2490	2226	2376	2327

Table 6: Problem gambling among 11-15 year olds, by age and survey year				
	2014	2015	2016	2017
<b>11-13 yr olds</b>				
Non gambler/non-problem gambler (DSM score 0)	94.8	94.7	95.2	96.3
DSM score 1	2.9	2.6	2.4	2
DSM score 2-3	1.8	2.1	1.8	1.3
Problem gambler (DSM score 4 or more)	0.5	0.6	0.6	0.4
<b>14-15 yr olds</b>				
Non gambler/non-problem gambler (DSM score 0)	95.1	95.8	95.3	94.8
DSM score 1	2.5	2.5	2.2	2.3
DSM score 2-3	1.5	1.1	1.8	1.4
Problem gambler (DSM score 4 or more)	0.9	0.7	0.6	1.6
<b>Bases</b>				
<i>Weighted</i>				
<i>11-13 yr olds</i>	1328	1151	1264	1281
<i>14-15 yr olds</i>	1115	1025	1011	1024
<i>Unweighted</i>				
<i>11-13 yr olds</i>	1419	1188	1385	1338
<i>14-15 yr olds</i>	1071	1038	991	989

**London School of Hygiene  
& Tropical Medicine**

Keppel Street, London WC1E 7HT  
United Kingdom

[www.lshtm.ac.uk](http://www.lshtm.ac.uk)

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