The role of self-directed tools and strategies in reducing gambling harm

An explore report

Bournemouth University

BIT

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Acknowledgements

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Glossary of self-directed tools

Time limits are tools typically available on gambling operator websites, which limit the amount of time spent on the website or playing games. Some less restrictive tools, such as reality checks only send a warning message without limiting access e.g. sending an alert, which allows the user to decide if they want to keep playing

Deposit limits are tools available on all gambling operator websites. They limit the amount of money a customer can pay into their account over a specified period of time, such as one day, week, or month.

Spend limits place a restriction on the amount of money a customer can stake in games or bet on a gambling operator's website over a specified period of time.

Self-exclusion refers to voluntary schemes that record customers' personal information and restrict them from accessing gambling products. Some self-exclusion schemes only cover one brand, while others include all brands for a certain type of gambling, such as Gamstop for online gambling or MOSES for multi-operator land based exclusion

Blocking tools restrict access to gambling websites or applications on digital devices. Banks offer blocking tools that restrict payment to gambling operators based on their merchant code.

Apps with therapeutic support offer mental health advice and related functionalities.

Educational resources are typically provided by gambling support organisations and aim to inform people about the risks and potential harms of gambling.

Helplines provide immediate one-to-one support to callers and are typically operated by gambling support or health organisations.

Executive summary

Background

This report presents the findings from the explore phase of a project aimed at understanding the experiences of people using self directed tools and strategies (SDTS) to manage, reduce, or stop gambling.

This research addresses a gap identified in previous studies. While SDTS offer an accessible, private, and often preferred alternative to formal treatment, their potential remains unrealised. Evidence shows that people's uptake and sustained engagement remain low.

In this project, we used a multi-phase research design to understand why and how people engage with SDTS: a literature scan, expert interviews, 30 in-depth reflexive interviews, a diary study, a large-scale survey, and co-design workshops. This report summarises our findings from the explore phase, with a separate synthesis report covering the wider project, which includes exploring practical solutions.

Research questions

The following research questions guided the explore phase:

Primary research questions

1. What are individuals' levels of awareness and knowledge around SDTS? What is their understanding of the purpose and use of these tools and strategies?

2. What are individuals' experiences with using SDTS? What challenges and difficulties do they experience related to access, use, and engagement?

3. How do these experiences differ for different communities, including those at risk of marginalisation?

Secondary research questions

4. Which tools are effective in helping individuals reduce or manage their gambling activity, and what factors does this effectiveness depend on?

5. What improvements would individuals suggest to existing tools or recommend for new tools?

Methodology

In the Explore phase, we conducted primary research with 30 interview participants, 8 diary participants, and 2,000 survey respondents, who were seeking to manage, reduce, or stop their gambling.

Qualitative methods

This study used a longitudinal qualitative design to explore gambling behaviours and experiences of SDTS over time. Reflexive interviews were conducted with 30 participants at two time points over two months. Most participants (n=25) were currently gambling and seeking to reduce or manage their behaviour; the remainder had stopped gambling. Reflexive interviewing supported deeper insight by allowing participants to reflect on change over time and challenge researchers' interpretations.

The sample included tool and strategy users (n=26) and non-users (n=4), with deliberate oversampling of marginalised groups across gender, ethnicity, religion, age, and digital skills. Participants were recruited via a specialist recruitment agency and through lived-experience networks with established safeguarding processes.

Time Point 1 interviews explored gambling behaviours, awareness and perceptions of tools and strategies, motivations, barriers and facilitators to use, and perceived impacts. Findings were analysed using the Framework approach to identify key themes and gaps. Time Point 2 interviews examined changes since the first interview and were used to sense-check and refine earlier findings.

A one-month diary study was also conducted with eight participants actively using tools and strategies. Participants recorded regular reflections on tool use and gambling behaviour via an online platform. Diary and interview data were analysed using the Framework approach and integrated to triangulate findings and strengthen thematic analysis.

Quantitative methods

We conducted a quantitative survey with approximately 2,000 adults in Great Britain who had gambled in the past year and wanted to reduce their gambling. The survey measured the prevalence, drivers, barriers, and perceived effectiveness of SDTS, and explored differences by demographic group and PGSI category.

Survey questions were informed by the qualitative findings. Data was analysed using descriptive statistics and weighted by gender and ethnicity to improve representativeness. Survey findings are presented alongside qualitative insights, with subgroup differences reported where possible.

Lived experience advisory panel

A Lived Experience Advisory Panel (LEAP), composed of people who had experienced gambling harm themselves or as an affected other (individuals who experience harm as a result of someone else's gambling), was integral to the project's shaping. This panel provided guidance by co-developing the research scope, co-designing materials, assisting in the analysis of findings, and helping to prioritise and co-design the final recommendations and solutions presented in this report.

Findings

Awareness of tools and strategies

Awareness of gambling management support is higher for formal tools than for informal strategies. People are most familiar with tangible, online tools that directly restrict gambling, such as self-exclusion, operator limits, and bank blocks, while awareness of offline support and reflective tools is lower.

Awareness of self-directed strategies is lower still. When identified, strategies tend to be those individuals are already using, often without recognising them as such. This may include avoiding triggers, setting personal budgets, involving family, or using behavioural techniques. Because strategies are less formalised and visible than tools, they can be harder to recognise, share, and refine.

Tools are typically learned about through digital and operator-led channels, while strategies are more often developed through peers, social networks, and personal experience. Access to both depends heavily on digital access and effective signposting, with individuals who gamble through land based channels particularly disadvantaged. There is a clear opportunity to improve visibility, formalise effective strategies, and strengthen pathways to learning about both tools and strategies.

Motivation to seek self-directed support

People were most often motivated to seek self-directed gambling tools and strategies after experiencing harm, including loss of control, financial or time harms, emotional distress, and concerns about relationships. Motivation was frequently future-focused and linked to wider life goals such as saving money, improving health, or strengthening relationships, not just reducing gambling. Motivation could strengthen over time as life circumstances change or as tools help people regain control.

However, many people lacked motivation because they did not see themselves as the intended audience for gambling support, viewing tools as only necessary for those experiencing severe harm. Optimism bias and underestimation of harm reduced self-recognition, while doubts about SDTS effectiveness, trustworthiness, or usability further limited uptake.

Stigma and fear of judgement are additional barriers impacting motivation. Some avoided discussing gambling with others due to shame or fear of criticism, leading to preference for managing alone despite recognising that social support can help in moments of need.

Overall, uptake of self-directed support depends on harm recognition, alignment with personal goals, social context, and trust.

Taking up tools and strategies

Tool use

People generally reported using a small set of tools, often operator-provided limits or self-exclusion, with usage typically at least weekly:

- Among those who had used operator tools, people were most likely to have used deposit limits, viewing them as a simple and less intrusive way to manage gambling, offering subtle reminders of time and money spent without feeling overly restrictive.

- Those using self exclusion were most likely to use it to exclude from online gambling sites. It tended to be used in moments of crisis or at the point other tools had failed, reflecting an informal 'stepped-care' approach.

- Uptake of other tools such as blocking tools, apps with therapeutic content, educational resources, and helplines varied across demographics. Women were more likely to use therapeutic apps, men more likely to use blocking tools, and ethnic minority users more likely to use apps, educational resources, and helplines.

Barriers to use included perceived poor tool design, difficulty setting up or accessing tools, incomplete information regarding their function, online-only formats that weren't suitable, privacy concerns, and doubts about effectiveness. Personal preferences, such as wanting human connection over automated tools, indicated the need for a diverse range of options.

Strategy use

The most commonly used strategies included setting limits or goals, avoiding triggers, establishing gambling-free times or places, involving trusted individuals in financial management, mindfulness and relaxation techniques, and watching videos from people with lived gambling experience.

These strategies were primarily chosen to help them feel more structured or disciplined about their gambling, give them a target or goal to work towards, reduce temptation through avoiding triggers, establish boundaries around their behaviour and to receive additional support.

The key barriers to strategy use included a general lack of awareness or ability to locate information about different options. Some people expressed privacy concerns associated with including family or friends or fear of experiencing stigma. Others believed that strategies were not relevant to their specific situation or needs or found the habit setting element of strategies too challenging.

Staying engaged with tools and strategies

A number of factors impacting engagement were identified during the explore phase:

- **Tool design and engagement:** Sustained engagement with tools could be dependent on their design. Tools that were difficult to circumvent, through built-in barriers, "friction" for deactivation, or enforced cooldown periods tended to maintain engagement. Whereas those that were easy to circumvent, either as a result of their design or broader systemic issues, tended to show less sustained engagement.
- **Behavioural barriers:** A key factor impacting engagement was the difficulty experienced whilst managing impulses to gamble or maintaining the self-control required for continued engagement. Some people experienced a false sense of security, having prematurely assumed they had recovered after seeing initial progress, and stopped using their tools and strategies.
- **Behavioural enablers:** Actions that tended to improve engagement included integrating tools into daily routines, particularly those that run automatically or require minimal effort, which encourages sustained use. Tools that are aligned with users' psychological needs, such as enabling gradual reductions in gambling, addressing underlying causes, and tracking progress toward meaningful goals like saving for a holiday, also maintained engagement. Experiencing tangible improvements in wellbeing, or finances provided additional positive feedback, reinforcing continued use.
- **Social factors:** These can exert a dual influence. Supportive networks, such as partners and family, can encourage adherence, especially in financial

management. However, social exposure to gambling through friends or group activities can normalise the behaviour, while stigma or fear of judgment may inhibit disclosure or engagement. Alcohol and peer pressure, particularly during major gambling events such as racing festivals, can further impact engagement with tools and strategies.

Impact and effectiveness of tools and strategies

SDTS were widely viewed as having positive impacts on gambling behaviour, personal wellbeing and interpersonal relationships:

- Users discussed their experiences of successfully reducing or stopping the time or money they spent gambling. Tools and strategies were seen as supporting these outcomes by enabling direct restrictions, supporting conscious decision-making, and increasing awareness of gambling harms and financial risks
- Users also reported enhanced personal wellbeing, including improved mental and physical health, greater financial freedom, and a renewed sense of control. For those who continued to gamble, tools helped them do so within clearer boundaries, enhancing enjoyment while freeing time for other activities and promoting pride in their progress. Spillover benefits were also noted, such as reduced alcohol consumption and increased engagement in exercise.
- Interpersonal relationships were similarly strengthened, with users reporting greater trust and improved communication with family and partners, as well as the development of new social activities not linked to gambling.

However, the adoption of SDTS was not without challenges. Some users reported limited impact on their gambling behaviour or unintended consequences, particularly when they stopped suddenly. Restricting one type of gambling sometimes led individuals to substitute other gambling activities, gamble more overall, or engage in prolonged sessions with lower stakes. Emotional difficulties were common, including frustration, irritability, and stress during the adjustment period.

These findings highlight the importance of gradual, manageable approaches to reducing gambling rather than abrupt stopping. SDTS should emphasise that recovery can be non-linear, framing setbacks and negative emotions as a normal part of the journey.

Next steps

The subsequent phase of this project was focused on generating recommendations and ideas to inform the work and offering of gambling support organisations,

including GambleAware[1]. We aimed to focus our solution exploration on the most important challenges and barriers identified in our Explore phase, and worked closely with the LEAP panel to help determine the focus and priorities.

Details on the later stages of this project can be found in our final synthesis report.

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[1] The landscape for commissioning research, prevention and treatment services for gambling in Great Britain is undergoing a structural transition following the 2023 Gambling Act Review White Paper. Effective from April 2025, a mandatory statutory levy has replaced the previous voluntary contribution system. The new commissioning bodies include NHS England, Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), with GambleAware undergoing a managed closure by March 2026. We believe findings from this project are relevant for these new stakeholders and would encourage them to consider the recommendations discussed.

Background

The Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) with Bournemouth University have been commissioned by GambleAware to conduct a research project aimed at (1) understanding the experience of people in Great Britain who gamble with self directed tools and strategieS (SDTS) to manage, reduce or quit gambling and (2) identifying ideas and recommendations for how GambleAware and other stakeholders can better support the uptake and use of these tools.

This project built on a scoping study commissioned by GambleAware, summarising the existing evidence surrounding self-help strategies to reduce gambling.[2] The scoping study highlighted the breadth of SDTS available to individuals but was limited in its ability to recommend specific tools or identify engagement approaches or potential improvements for tools and strategies. This project aimed to address these gaps through primary research with users with lived experience.

Throughout the project, we paid particular attention to groups at risk of marginalisation. This term can include any group of individuals who might face specific barriers or have specific, unmet needs in relation to gambling support due to, for example, their ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or age. We also sought to incorporate the insights of those affected by someone else's gambling, such as friends and family members.

SDTS represent a broad and varied range of interventions intended to help people manage and reduce their gambling behaviour with minimal or no professional support. For the purposes of this report we have defined SDTS to include:

- **Tools:** Any tools or resources offered by gambling charities, operators or other stakeholders (e.g. banks) that can help individuals manage or reflect on their gambling behaviour with no or very limited involvement of a professional. Such tools include, for example, GambleAware's Spend Calculator, Gamstop self exclusion scheme, GamBan's blocking software, GamblersAnonymous, or gambling blocks and limits offered by banks.

- **Strategies:** Self-management strategies, such as recognising and avoiding triggers that may lead to gambling, talking to family members about gambling in a goal-oriented manner, or goal setting to stop or reduce gambling. These approaches might or might not be supported by tools in the

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[2] Alma economics (2023). Self-help strategies for reducing gambling harms Scoping Study. Available at https://www.begambleaware.org/sites/default/files/2023-12/Self-help%20strategies%20-%20Final%20report.pdf

previous bullet point, provided by gambling charities or other stakeholders (such as, for example, through online information or workbooks).

In the 'Scoping' phase of the project, we explored the tools and strategies available for those in Great Britain (GB) seeking to manage their gambling. We conducted desk research - reviewing both academic and grey literature - and consulted with experts in gambling harm support and research to create an overview of all relevant tools and strategies available (listed in Appendix B). We also set up a Lived Experience Advisory Panel (referred to as LEAP hereon) with seven people who had tried to reduce their gambling in the past or who had been negatively affected by someone else's gambling. The scoping phase helped to shape the methods used in the explore phase, the ordering of research activities, and the data collection materials. We worked with the members of the LEAP to finalise the explore approach during the scoping phase.

In the 'Explore' phase, the focus of this report, we conducted primary research with 30 interview participants and 2,000 survey respondents, seeking to manage, reduce, or stop their gambling to develop a comprehensive understanding of the barriers and facilitators impacting the uptake and use of these tools and strategies. This report summarises our findings from this phase.

These findings will be used to guide the following 'Solutions' phase of the project, aimed at developing ideas and recommendations for how stakeholders can better support the uptake, use and effectiveness of these tools and strategies, through design and broader system changes.

The accompanying synthesis report will cover the latter stages of the project and outline the recommendations stemming from this research.

Research Questions

There were three broad aims of this project:

- Understand the experience of people who gamble using SDTS to manage, reduce or quit gambling and the barriers they face.
- Identify ideas and recommendations for how GambleAware and other stakeholders can better support the uptake and use of SDTS. This included recommendations for improvements to existing support options, as well as ideas about new tools and strategies.
- Understand, in particular, the experiences in relation to self-directed change of those from marginalised groups. This term included any group of people who might face specific barriers or have specific, unmet needs in relation to gambling support due to, for example, their ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or age.

We distilled the overall aims into the following research questions, which guided the explore phase:

Primary research questions

1. What are individuals' levels of awareness and knowledge around SDTS? What is their understanding of the purpose and use of these tools and strategies?
2. What are individuals' experiences with using SDTS? What challenges and difficulties do they experience related to access, use, and engagement?
3. How do these experiences differ for different communities, including those at risk of marginalisation?

Secondary research questions

4. Which tools are effective in helping individuals reduce or manage their gambling activity, and what factors does this effectiveness depend on?
5. What improvements would individuals suggest to existing tools or recommend for new tools?

Methodology

During our Explore phase, we utilised three research strands to answer our research questions: reflexive interviews, a dairy study, and a quantitative survey.

Qualitative research

Reflexive interviews

In this study, we conducted reflexive interviews at two time points over the course of two months with a sample of 30 participants[3]. A majority (n = 25) were individuals currently gambling who were interested in reducing, stopping, or managing their gambling behaviour. The remaining were individuals who no longer gambled. The Reflexive interviews allowed us to capture any changing perceptions of what was working well or not, how tool and strategy use changes over time, and the evolution of user journeys. Participants were encouraged to reflect on and clarify their accounts, thus achieving a deeper level of participation and more balanced power dynamics with researchers — for example, participants had the opportunity to correct any erroneous inferences the researchers made based on their responses in the first interview.

Participants included a mix of tool and strategy users (n = 26) and non-users (n = 4)[4]. Our sampling criteria sought a diverse range of participants, including those from marginalised identities relating to gender, ethnicity, religion, age, and digital skills.

We recruited participants through two channels:

- **Specialist recruitment agency:** We worked with the recruitment agency Criteria to recruit the majority of research participants.

- **Lived experience networks:** Building on both BIT's and Bournemouth University's contacts, we worked with partners at organisations like GamCare and BetKnowMore to help recruit our sample. These organisations had established Lived Experience networks with strong safeguarding measures in place that we were able to leverage. Their members also represented a range of different communities.

Through both approaches, participants were required to complete an expression of information, which asked questions on the specific sampling criteria. Our sampling

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[3] We interviewed 30 participants in Time point 1, and 26 participants in Time point 2.
[4] While we actively sought to recruit more non-users, several participants initially identified as such were found during interviews to be using informal strategies unconsciously; budgetary constraints ultimately prevented further purposive resampling

quotas specifically oversampled for specific demographics to support our aims to capture the experiences of those from marginalised groups.

Further details on our sample and recruitment approach can be found in [Appendix A](#).

Participants were interviewed twice. In the Time point 1 interviews, they were asked questions regarding their:

- Gambling behaviour, such as the types of gambling they engage in and their frequency of gambling
- Awareness and knowledge about tools and strategies
- Motivations and views on tools and strategies
- Barriers and facilitators in taking up and using tools and strategies
- Experiences and impacts from these tools and strategies

Time point 1 data was analysed using the Framework approach (details can be found in [Appendix A](#)).Based on these findings, we identified gaps in our insights and areas requiring further analysis.

In the Time point 2 interviews, questions focussed on:

- Exploring if participants underwent any changes with respect to their gambling since the first interview
- Sense-checking our findings with the participants
- Asking participants to reflect, check and challenge our findings from the first wave, and share any additional ideas these generated

We then conducted analysis of the Time point 2 data, using the Framework approach, clarifying, expanding, and contextualising our findings from the first set of interviews.

Diary study

In between Time point 1 and Time point 2 interviews, we conducted a diary study with a subset of our sample from the reflexive interviews who were actively using SDTS. A diary study collects data from participants over a period of time, asking them to record data at specific intervals. This methodology helps us surface insights on routines and regular experiences, which may be difficult to recall in an interview alone. Furthermore, as barriers to use of a tool may be complex, this method provides participants with the time and space needed to reflect on and articulate them.

We recruited eight interview participants to maintain a diary for a month, using the online platform FieldNotes. These participants were selected based on them actively using a range of tools and strategies to manage their gambling. We asked them to:

- Regularly note down their experiences of using tools and strategies
- Reflect on their gambling behaviours over this period (e.g. type of gambling, frequency, gambling environment)

There was a mix of structured prompts and free form entries. Participants could add content to their diaries any time they wanted, including multiple times a day, and were reminded to contribute on a weekly basis.

These findings were then analysed using the Framework approach and combined with the data from the reflexive interviews. This allowed for themes to be identified in a transparent and structured way, and for the diary study data to help triangulate the interview findings, and provide specific examples of experiences participants had.

This process involved creating an analytical framework to categorise participants and analyse their characteristics, their attitudes and experience using SDTS. The qualitative data was summarised in the appropriate cell. Thematic analysis was then undertaken to identify the range of concepts and themes from across the sample and between different subgroups or personas (segments of the sample) where there was evidence available. These were analysed to understand how each participant's characteristics, views and experiences interrelated. It's worth noting that given the small sample size, subgroup analysis was limited.

Quantitative survey

Following our qualitative research, we conducted a survey on our purpose-built online platform, Predictiv, gathering quantitative data on the prevalence of different tools and strategies, motivators and drivers of tool use, barriers to uptake and perceived effectiveness of different tools and strategies. This survey also aimed to capture differences in these outcome measures across demographic groups and based on the PGSI category.[5]

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[5] The Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI) is a measure to estimate people's risk of experiencing problems from gambling ('problem gambling'). Based on their responses, people are categorised as follows:
- PGSI score 0 = Individual engaging in no-risk gambling
- PGSI score 1 to 2 = Representing low risk gambling by which a person is unlikely to have experienced any adverse consequences from gambling but may be at risk if they are heavily involved in gambling.
- PGSI score 3 to 7 = Representing moderate risk gambling by which a person may or may not have experienced any adverse consequences from gambling but may be at risk if they are heavily involved in gambling.
- PGSI score 8 or more = Representing problem gambling by which a person will have experienced adverse consequences from gambling and may have lost control of

We sampled approximately 2,000 adults in GB who have gambled in the past 12 months and who currently or have previously wished to spend less time or money on gambling or reduce their gambling in some other way (see Table 1). Participants were recruited via online panels. They were asked a range of questions to help us capture the prevalence of different SDTS to help reduce or manage gambling, the motivators and drivers of SDTS use, barriers to uptake and use, and perceived effectiveness. The qualitative research insights were used to develop the options for each question. This included the answers for different tools and strategies used and barriers and enablers to use. Our survey design can be found in Appendix A.

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their behaviour. Involvement in gambling can be at any level, but it is likely to be heavy.

More details can be found here: https://www.gamblingcommission.gov.uk/statistics-and-research/publication/problem-gambling-screens

Table 1: Quantitative survey participant demographics

Category	Segment	Count (n)	Percentage
Gender	Female	1,003	50%
	Male	1,002	50%
Age	18-25 years	400	20%
	25-54 years	282	14%
	55+ years	284	14%
Ethnicity	White	1,269	63%
	Black	349	17%
	Asian	248	12%
	Other	139	7%

While we listed a wide range of tools and strategies in the survey, these were not exhaustive due to constraints around the size of the survey. The pre-defined list of tools and strategies presented to participants may have influenced their survey responses, particularly their reflections on the relevance and effectiveness of these options. This is a key limitation of the survey.

We calculated descriptive statistics for all survey questions. The gender and ethnicity of respondents were not representative of the general population of people who gamble. Therefore, we weighted the data by these characteristics to ensure our sample was representative of those for whom these tools and strategies are available (see Appendix A for more information).

In the following section, we outline our key findings. Evidence across all three research methodologies have been synthesised and presented together.

In some cases, the sample size or methodology used for data collection did not allow us to link findings to specific demographic groups. Where possible, however, we do report which subgroup(s) a finding is most relevant to and any differences across demographic groups.

Limitations of this research

- **Tool Effectiveness:** The study does not provide comparative effectiveness assessments of different tools or definitive conclusions about which intervention works best for whom. This would require a different methodology, such as randomised control trials or extensive user-testing. Thus, there is limited evidence to answer our third research question on comparative tool and strategy effectiveness conclusively.
- **Strategy Detail**: Due to the abstract and informal nature of self-directed strategies, the research could not capture their long-term usage patterns or the full nuance of their implementation in as much detail as formal tools.
- **Experiences of marginalised communities:** Our qualitative research found limited comparative data on the experiences of different marginalised communities with SDTS due to difficulties in recruiting a broad-ranging sample. We have included data where we have it available.

Rationale for barrier-focused analysis

A key aim of this research study was to understand the barriers and challenges people face when using SDTS. This report organises findings around these cross-cutting barriers. This analytical approach was chosen for three key reasons:

1. **Many barriers to self-directed change are systemic, not tool specific.** A core aim of this research was to understand the barriers and challenges people face in using self-directed support. Our analysis shows that most barriers affect people's experiences across multiple tools and strategies. For example, stigma impacts both formal tools and informal strategies. Similarly, difficulties with sustained engagement appear to arise regardless of which specific tool people use. Organising findings around these barriers provides deeper insight into the fundamental challenges of self-directed change than tool-by-tool descriptions.

2. **This approach reflects how people navigate self-directed support.** Our participants were sampled based on their desire to manage, reduce, or stop their gambling, rather than their use of specific tools. This mirrors the real-world situation where people experiencing gambling harm are trying to find support that works for them, often trying multiple approaches simultaneously or sequentially. Our methodology captured this lived experience of navigating the ecosystem of self-directed support, rather than evaluating individual tools or strategies in isolation.

3. **Our research design prioritised breadth of understanding.** We conducted mixed-methods research across approximately 2,000 survey respondents, 30 longitudinal interview participants and eight diary study participants. This approach enabled us to identify patterns across the diverse landscape of SDTS, understand which barriers are most significant, and develop recommendations applicable across the sector. A comprehensive evaluation of individual tool effectiveness would have required a different methodology - specifically, controlled user testing or efficacy trials of specific interventions - which was not the focus of this research.

This analytical approach means our findings are strongest in identifying systemic barriers, understanding user journeys, and providing sector-wide recommendations. Where participants shared experiences with specific named tools or strategies, we report these insights. However, readers should note that we do not provide comparative effectiveness assessments between different tools, detailed usability evaluations of specific platforms, or definitive conclusions about which tool works best for which person. Any findings regarding specific tools reflect participants' lived experiences and perspectives. Where possible, we have incorporated feasibility and impact considerations, including direct feedback from sector experts and stakeholders, to contextualise these user-generated insights. Such questions would benefit from future focused evaluation studies.

This barrier-focused analysis directly addresses our research aims: understanding experiences with self-directed change, identifying barriers (particularly for marginalised groups), and developing recommendations to improve uptake and engagement across the ecosystem of support.

For these reasons, the findings section is structured around the stages of a typical user journey, with barriers highlighted at each point; from awareness through motivation, uptake, engagement, and longer-term impact.

Findings

Figure 1: Visual overview of the findings section, representing the user journey of an individual taking up SDTS

Awareness	Motivation & Decision	Uptake	Engage-ment	Impact
Knowing about available tools and strategies	Having the motivation and making the decision to use tools and strategies	Starting to use a tool or strategy	Continuing to use a tool or strategy	The impact of tool and strategy use on gambling, wellbeing, and relationships
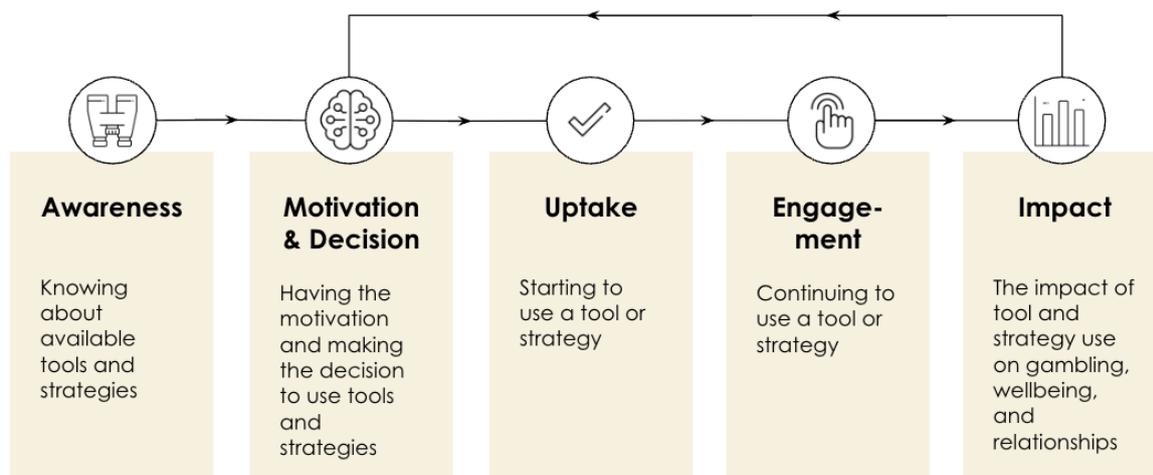
We have organised the findings from our qualitative and quantitative research across the simplified user journey (generated from our qualitative and quantitative data) of an individual taking up SDTS. The journey is a simplified and generic representation designed to capture the commonalities across different groups (gender, age, ethnicity), motivations (e.g. reduce gambling, stop gambling), and PGSI category[6].

Importantly, the journey of using SDTS is not necessarily linear; people might move back and forth between different stages, updating their motivations and decision-making based on previous experiences.

The first stage in the simplified user journey is awareness of the range of tools and strategies available and how to access them.

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[6] PGSI refers to the Problem Gambling Severity Index which is used to measure the risk of someone experiencing gambling harm. More information can be found here: https://www.gamblingcommission.gov.uk/statistics-and-research/publication/problem-gambling-screens
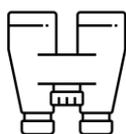
1) Awareness of Tools and Strategies

Awareness of tools[7]

People who were aware of SDTS mentioned the following tools:[8]

- **Tools and resources that stop people from gambling** such as self-exclusion (like Gamstop), operator tools (blocks, limits, timeouts, etc.), and bank tools (gamble blocks or limits)
- **Tools or resources providing education and understanding to allow people to take control over their gambling** such as educational resources (YouTube videos, social media, GambleAware, NHS and operator websites, chatbots), and reflection tools (diaries, participating on Lived Experience panels, mental health apps)
- **Tools or resources supporting ongoing** recovery and **healthier** relationships with gambling such as support groups (Gamblers Anonymous or online forums), and financial tools (budgeting tools)

There was better awareness of online tools (self exclusion) compared to offline tools (like GamblersAnonymous). Similarly, people were also more likely to be familiar with tools that **directly impact gambling behaviour** (like a limit) than reflective tools which help people **understand *why* they gamble** (like a diary).

Broader research shows that awareness of gambling management tools among those who gamble tends to be low - for example, an international systematic review and meta-analysis found that just over 1 in 10 people who gamble have awareness of self-exclusion schemes.[9] Similarly, research among those who gamble online found that most were aware of some gambling management tools, but awareness

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[7] The results in the sub-section come from our qualitative data alone. This is due to awareness specific questions not being included within the survey. There are therefore no quantitative statistics presented here.

[8] This aligns with the Gambling Lived Experience Network (GLEN)'s categorisation of tools.

[9] Bijker, R., et al., international prevalence of self-exclusion From gambling: A systematic review and meta-analysis. Current Addiction Reports, 2023. 10(4): p. 844-859.

was not universal and tended to be higher for more visible or less restrictive features, like activity statements, than for tools such as deposit limits or self-exclusion.[10, 11]

Awareness of strategies[12]

People who were aware of SDTS mentioned the following strategies:

- **Involving individuals (e.g., partner, family):** engaging partners or family members in financial management or discussing their gambling with them.
- **Avoiding triggers or exposure to gambling**: actively avoiding gambling venues (e.g., bookmakers, casinos), deleting gambling apps, asking friends and family not to bring up gambling, leaving gambling-related social media groups, blocking social media invitations, and avoiding gambling environments (e.g., pubs, sports radio, football matches).
- **Setting limits or budgeting**: using only cash or leaving bank cards at home, setting personal mental limits on spending, frequency, or time, gradually reducing overall expenditure, and pre-planning budgets for anticipated events involving gambling (e.g., Cheltenham).
- **Employing psychological techniques** like self-encouragement or "pep talks."
- **Using behavioural/environmental controls:** opting for web browsers over gambling apps, substituting participation in gambling with spectating, and engaging in alternative activities like exercise or listening to podcasts to occupy time.

Overall, people were more likely to have an awareness of tools than of strategies. Of those who did have an awareness of strategies, they could only identify the ones they were currently using and were unable to identify other options, or provide much sense of how effective they were. Some people were using strategies to manage their gambling but did not identify them as such, creating a potential recognition gap. They may attribute any success to external factors such as luck or lack of opportunity, rather than as a result of their own efforts. Formalising these behaviours as recognised strategies would allow them to take more ownership of any success, boosting self-efficacy. It would also allow for greater sharing of strategies to allow others to use to support their own gambling management.

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[10] Gainsbury, S., Angus, D., Procter, L., & Blaszczynski, A. (2019). Use of Consumer Protection Tools on Internet Gambling Sites: Customer Perceptions, Motivators, and Barriers to Use. Journal of Gambling Studies, 36, 259-276. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10899-019-09859-8.

[11] Griffiths, M., Wood, R., & Parke, J. (2009). Social Responsibility Tools in Online Gambling: A Survey of Attitudes and Behavior among Internet Gamblers. Cyberpsychology & behavior : the impact of the Internet, multimedia and virtual reality on behavior and society, 12 4, 413-21 . https://doi.org/10.1089/cpb.2009.0062.

[12] The results in the sub-section come from our qualitative data alone. This is due to awareness specific questions not being included within the survey. There are therefore no quantitative statistics presented here.

Key reflections

Awareness of strategies may be lower because they are less formalised than tools. People reflected how tools such as self-exclusion or deposit limits are tangible - for example, they can be activated or downloaded. In contrast, strategies are more abstract, requiring personal cognitive effort, and an individual discovery element.

This distinction has two key consequences. Firstly, while the abstract nature of strategies allows for personalisation, it often means they are developed in isolation, without the benefit of the shared knowledge or resources that exist for formal tools.

Secondly, it creates a recognition gap. Individuals taking proactive steps may not recognise their own actions as valid or transferable 'strategies'. They may also perceive any successes as temporary or coincidental. As a result, they are less likely to consciously refine these behaviours or share them with others. This could have additional impacts on their own motivation and the likelihood of them continuing to engage with the strategy long term.

This highlights an opportunity to 'formalise' and validate these strategies. Providing resources, such as a best-practice guide for involving trusted individuals in one's finances, could help codify and refine these personalised approaches. This would also allow for greater ease of use during periods of time when cognitive load is high, as the strategy would be more readily available. To be effective, this must be combined with a dedicated effort to build awareness of the range of strategies available.

Learning about tools and strategies

People learn about SDTS through:[13]

- **Internet searches and social media platforms.** The survey (Fig. 2) shows that 41% of people would search online to find gambling management tools and strategies. Platforms like Google, Reddit, YouTube, TikTok, and Facebook were important sources. Internet searches were more important for learning about tools than strategies.
- **Signposting** on advertisements on gambling applications or websites, which was mentioned by 29% of people.
- **Peer and social networks** including community forums, Gamblers Anonymous, and direct interactions with friends, family, or colleagues. This was backed by

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[13] People also mentioned that resources and information they received from participating in the study were also a mechanism for learning about available tools and strategies.

26% of people, and these networks were particularly salient for learning about strategies.

- **Professional help** such as guidance from therapists, General Practitioners (GPs), or employee assistance helplines (26%).
- **Past experiences** such as drawing on strategies used in other areas of life (11%).

Figure 2: How people who gamble and want to reduce or stop their gambling go about finding tools and strategies

How people go about finding tools and strategies
(n = 2,005)

Response	Percentage
I would search online (e.g., Google, Reddit, forums)	41%
I would try a few different tools and strategies to see what works	34%
I would explore tools or strategies mentioned in ads or app signposts	29%
I would ask friends, family, or peers for recommendations	26%
I would speak to a professional (e.g., therapist, GP)	26%
I would not look for more information; I'd rely on past tools and strategies I've used in other areas of life	11%
Other	< 1%

Respondents could choose multiple response options.

People had different experiences finding tools - some suggested it was easy to find these on gambling websites or apps, while others found it more challenging, e.g., due to limited signposting. **Different tools were also seen as being more or less easy to locate** - for example, tools like self-exclusion tools were highlighted as being hard to locate whereas operator tools like limits were seen as being easy to find. Similarly, those who gambled offline found it more challenging to learn about support options - people noted a lack of visibility for support options, such as warning messages and helpline numbers, in land-based settings, and insufficient advertising of tools and support both on TV and in betting shops.

It was **less clear how people first learnt of strategies**, though social networks played a key role, e.g., partners bringing up the idea of shared financial management.

Key reflections

Our data shows that while people are keen to find available tools or strategies - there are dependencies on:

- online access - limiting those who are digitally excluded or have lower digital literacy, or

- the information ecosystem an individual is in - such as signposting on ads or receiving guidance from GPs and social networks - which can be harder for individuals to control.

Insights from the qualitative research suggest that tools may be primarily learned via digital and operator-led channels, whereas strategies are predominantly developed through peers and personal experience. Highlighting this distinction is valuable, as it suggests that formal "tools" and informal "strategies" may require different outreach approaches to be effective.

There is therefore a need for more effective and accessible mechanisms for learning about available tools and strategies. Recommendations are discussed in greater detail in the final report.

Awareness of SDTS is intrinsically linked to the motivation to use them. People have individual reasons for seeking support for their gambling behaviour; ensuring people have the information they need to choose an approach aligned with their needs, may lead to greater motivation and subsequent engagement.

2) Motivation to seek self-directed support

Motivations for seeking SDTS

Experiences of individual harm or negative effects from gambling, motivated people to seek SDTS. These harms included:

- **Excessive gambling** such as chasing losses or spending too much time or money gambling
- **Negative secondary impacts of gambling** such as lying about gambling or thinking too much or worrying about gambling
- **Negative emotions about their gambling** such as shame, worry, stress, fears around losing control over their gambling or experiencing large financial losses in the future. For some, this also involved a fear of damaging or losing relationships, for example, an older participant spoke about feeling a sense of responsibility for their adult son when betting together.

People were often motivated to seek out SDTS to manage their gambling as part of larger goals or future focussed aspirations they had set themselves. These could be related to gambling such as stopping or reducing time and money spent on gambling or gaining greater control over gambling (e.g., avoiding the temptation to

gamble while bored). These also included non-gambling related goals such as saving money for a housing deposit, wedding, or holiday, as well as spending less time on their phones, improving their health or interpersonal relationships. This is echoed in our survey findings (Table 2).

Table 2: Reasons for using self-directed tools among those who said they used one or more of these tools in the past 12 month

Among those who said they used one or more of these tools in the past 12 months, % who said they used them because…	Time, deposit or spend limits	Self-exclusion tools	Blocking tools	Apps with therapeutic content	Educational resources	Helplines
	n = 936	n = 544	n = 706	n = 734	n = 650	n = 410
…they noticed signs that gambling was causing them harm (e.g. chasing losses, worrying about money or time, feeling ashamed or stressed)	36%	34%	35%	30%	35%	38%
…something happened that made them realise they needed [the tool] (e.g. losing a lot of money or gambling too much during a special event)	32%	31%	31%	28%	37%	37%
…they wanted to spend less time or money on gambling to stay in control or reach personal goals (e.g. saving money, feeling better, using my time differently)	56%	53%	47%	37%	43%	45%
…talking to friends or family made them reflect on their gambling	23%	24%	25%	25%	26%	37%
…they saw how gambling harmed someone they know and wanted to avoid the same outcome	28%	28%	28%	27%	26%	27%
…[tool(s)] are easy to find, set up, and	36%	35%	25%	28%	31%	31%

use						
...they often get reminders or messages from gambling websites or apps to set [tool]	28%	28%	27%	25%	-	-

Numbers in the table are weighted means, adjusted for gender and ethnicity.
Data collected by BIT on 16 May – 23 May 2025.

Factors that prompted reflection about gambling habits, leading people to seek out tools and strategies include:[14]

- **Indirect social influence:** others' detrimental experiences with gambling such as large financial losses, relationship breakdown, etc. These included experiences of those they knew personally or learned about through case studies.

- **Intervention from friends or family:** being challenged on their gambling behaviour by friends and family, highlighting potential harm, sometimes with encouragement and support to use SDTS.

- **Specific negative events** such as losing a large amount of money in a short period of time or getting upset because of gambling on special occasions like Christmas.

Some believed their motivation to reduce gambling had **changed over time.** For some, this shift was linked to using tools, for example, starting with a goal to reduce gambling but later deciding to stop completely, or finding it easier to delete gambling apps after self-excluding. For others, motivation changed due to being at a different life stage, with greater responsibilities and a clearer recognition of the benefits of using tools to achieve one's goals.

> **Key reflections**
>
> **A range of motivations drive people's desire to seek self-directed support.** It is important that tools, strategies and related communications and messaging tap into them to attract users. For example, messages that tap into people's ambitions for their futures.
>
> These messages and communications can also take advantage of timely moments - such as increasing messaging around key events when people are likely to gamble like large sporting events - as well as messenger effects - for example, encouraging friends and family to bring up the topic of gambling harm with individuals they are concerned about.

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[14] Individuals also indicated that participating in this research prompted them to reflect on their gambling behaviour as it gave them time to:
- reflect on their gambling
- acknowledge potential problems
- decide to make a change

Reasons for lacking or limited motivation to seek support

Perception that tools and strategies are not suitable

A key reason for why people chose not to seek out self-directed support was a perception that they were not the **target audience for this kind of support** - seeing them as being excessive for their gambling behaviour and only necessary for those experiencing serious gambling-related harms. There was a fear about restricting their gambling given the possibility of a big win in the future. These individuals saw gambling as often being spontaneous, with people generally unlikely to stop and set up tools or strategies before engaging, especially in the absence of warning, signposting, or support messages to encourage reflection on gambling.

Secondly, tools and strategies were perceived by some as ineffective. There was an assumption that these would not impact their gambling behaviour, particularly due to ineffective design (detailed design challenges per tool and strategy are detailed in the Effective design and accessibility section). Similarly, advice or support was perceived as being untrustworthy and generic rather than credible and specific. This was echoed in the survey findings: the most commonly cited reason for not using tools in the last 12 months was not thinking the tools would help manage or reduce gambling (Table 4).

> **Key reflections**
>
> **Our research suggests that one of the key factors for whether people seek self-directed support for their gambling is self-recognition of harm.** It determines if they see themselves as the 'target audience' for these tools and strategies.
>
> **However, research highlights a 'perception gap' or 'optimism bias' in how people view their own gambling**. While they can report significant harm accurately,[15] they often underestimate the potential scale of harm, especially for lower-level harms -

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[15] Newall, P., Rawat, V., Hing, N., Browne, M., Russell, A., Li, E., Rockloff, M., & Dellosa, G. (2024). Does the lived experience of gambling accord with quantitative self-report scores of gambling-related harm?. Addiction Research & Theory, 33, 150 - 160. https://doi.org/10.1080/16066359.2024.2365177.

for example, most people greatly underestimate their financial losses and how often they gamble.[16, 17]

This suggests that people who do not recognise their harm may not be motivated to seek support. Furthermore, some individuals may be slower to recognise the negative impacts of gambling, including those who struggle to reflect on their behaviours or emotions, or who fear the associated stigma. This reduces their motivation to get help.

People may also see self-directed support as a reactive crisis-management instrument rather than a proactive measure, seeking it only after experiencing harm. This view aligns with broader literature on the use of gambling management tools.[18, 19] **Therefore, it is vital to help people identify early signs of harm. It is also key to explain the benefits of managing gambling proactively and show how they can use self-directed support as a preventive measure.**

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[16] Heirene, R., Wang, A., & Gainsbury, S. (2021). Accuracy of self-reported gambling frequency and outcomes: Comparisons with account data.. Psychology of addictive behaviors : journal of the Society of Psychologists in Addictive Behaviors. https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/5hs7j.

[17] Muggleton, N. (2024). Redefining harm: The role of data integration in understanding gambling behaviour.. Addiction. https://doi.org/10.1111/add.16461.

[18] Gainsbury, S., Angus, D., Procter, L., & Blaszczynski, A. (2019). Use of Consumer Protection Tools on Internet Gambling Sites: Customer Perceptions, Motivators, and Barriers to Use. Journal of Gambling Studies, 36, 259-276. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10899-019-09859-8.

[19] Riley, B., Oakes, J., & Lawn, S. (2024). Gambling Harm-Minimisation Tools and Their Impact on Gambling Behaviour: A Review of the Empirical Evidence. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 21. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph21080998.

Fear of stigma or judgement to seeking self-directed support

Stigma or fear of judgement from others for seeking SDTS was also cited as a significant challenge. Cultural differences - for example, coming from communities where gambling is not culturally acceptable - or people finding it difficult to recognise signs of gambling-related harm were seen as factors likely to exacerbate stigma or judgement due to a lack of understanding about why people were seeking support for their gambling.

Lack of understanding around gambling related harm was also attributed to the normalisation and acceptance of gambling in their lives and social environments - wherein it was perceived and portrayed as a "fun" activity, making people feel isolated or alone when they experienced harm.

Fear of stigma also produced feelings of embarrassment or shame among people, who then avoided conversations about gambling or their problems with others. Given that the involvement of friends and family is a key factor in many self-directed strategies, stigma is thus a major barrier to uptake.

People navigated this challenge in two ways:

- Some people thought carefully about who they should speak to and only sought support from certain individuals who they trusted. They avoided those who might worry, not understand, be unsupportive, or be unwilling to help.
- Others chose to retreat into themselves, preferring to work through their issues alone before sharing with others.

Stigma also affected people's ability to seek out help or support for their gambling even when they recognised signs of harm in themselves. People were concerned about being perceived as having any issues with gambling - especially by others in their lives or by operators.

Our survey findings support this. A majority of people (66%) said they did not talk to family and friends about their gambling. Among these respondents, the most common reason was a preference to deal with it on their own (32%). However, they also cited a wide range of reasons including fear of being judged or criticised (29%), not wanting to worry or upset others (28%), and feelings of shame or embarrassment (26%) (see Table 3 for further details).

Our qualitative evidence suggests that this may be particularly salient among ethnic or religious minorities as well as older people, who were more likely to avoid discussing their gambling issues with others due to embarrassment or shame.

Table 3: Reasons for not talking to family and friends.

Among the 1,333 people who said they do not talk to their family and friends to manage or reduce their gambling, % who said this is because:	
32%	I prefer to deal with it on my own
29%	I'm worried about being judged or criticised
28%	I don't want to worry or upset them
26%	I feel ashamed or embarrassed about my gambling
25%	I don't think my gambling is serious enough to talk about
20%	I don't think they would understand
16%	I have tried before and it wasn't helpful

However, this view might change in moments of crisis or need — **just under half of all survey participants said that talking to your friends and family would be helpful when feeling stressed or overwhelmed, or when experiencing harm from gambling** (Figure 3). However, this also suggests that a majority of people feel reluctant to reach out to friends and family about their gambling.

Figure 3: When people think it would be helpful to talk to friends and family about gambling

When it could be helpful to talk to friends and family about gambling
(n = 2,005)

When I feel stressed or overwhelmed	44%
After I have experienced harm from gambling	44%
When I feel tempted to gamble	33%
I don't think it is helpful in any situation	14%
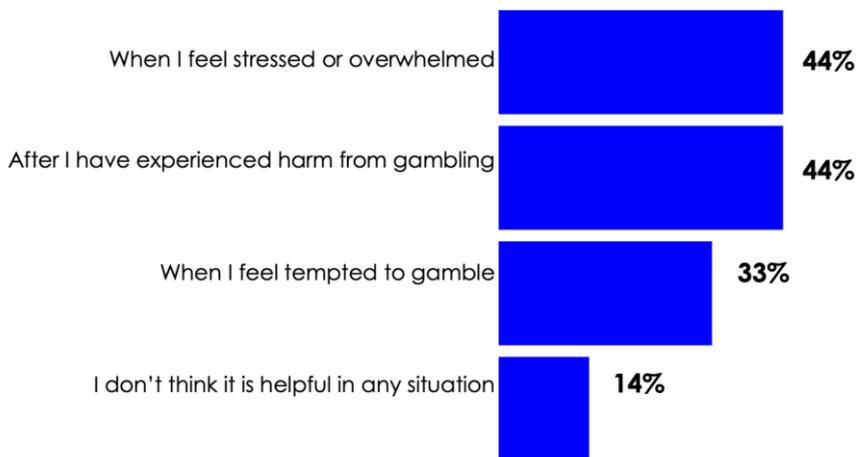
Respondents could choose multiple response options.

Key Reflections

Our findings suggest social dynamics determine whether people use self-directed support. This means it is key to **equip people to have conversations** around gambling with their friends and family. Similarly, developing **resources to support friends and family** to positively support those seeking self-directed support is also necessary.

This also highlights the importance of **broader destigmatising campaigns** - such as the Tackling Gambling Stigma project.[20]

However, we must also support individuals who experience stigma. For example, by highlighting and refining tools and strategies that allow people to seek help **privately and independently**. It is also important to **raise awareness of peer-to-peer groups** where people can find support outside their immediate circles, such as online forums and Gamblers Anonymous.

Other key challenge that impacted people's motivations to take up tools and strategies were:

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[20] More information can be found here: https://tacklinggamblingstigma.com/

- **They found tools and strategies were often difficult to set up**, or that they lacked the self-discipline or willpower to use them consistently.

- **They also described negative experiences with operators.** Users often felt unsupported and mistrusted operators, believing their business models prevented them from offering genuine help.

3) Taking up tools and strategies

Uptake of tools

Despite being aware of a larger range of tools, people generally reported using a smaller set of tools. Some used only a single tool - such as self-exclusion - while others used multiple tools in conjunction with each other - such as limits and educational materials. Of those who used each of the self-directed tools, the most commonly reported frequency of use was **at least once a week** (Table 4)

Table 4: Frequency of tool use

% who said they use these tools…	Time, deposit or spend limits	Self-exclusion tools	Blocking tools	Apps with therapeutic content	Educational resources	Helplines
	n = 936	n = 544	n = 706	n = 734	n = 650	n = 410
…Everyday or most days	22%	16%	20%	22%	20%	17%
…At least once a week	35%	26%	36%	41%	37%	36%
…2-3 times a month	20%	19%	23%	20%	24%	19%
…Once a month	13%	14%	10%	11%	10%	12%
…Every few months	9%	12%	9%	5%	8%	11%
…Once a year	2%	13%	3%	1%	1%	4%

Operator tools were the most commonly used tools in our survey.

Figure 4: Types of gambling management tools people used in the past 12 months

**Types of gambling management tools people used
in the past 12 months**
(n = 2,005)

…time, deposit or spend limits	48%
…blocking tools	34%
…apps with therapeutic content	34%
…educational resources	30%
…self-exclusion tools	27%
…helplines and online support	19%
…no tools	14%
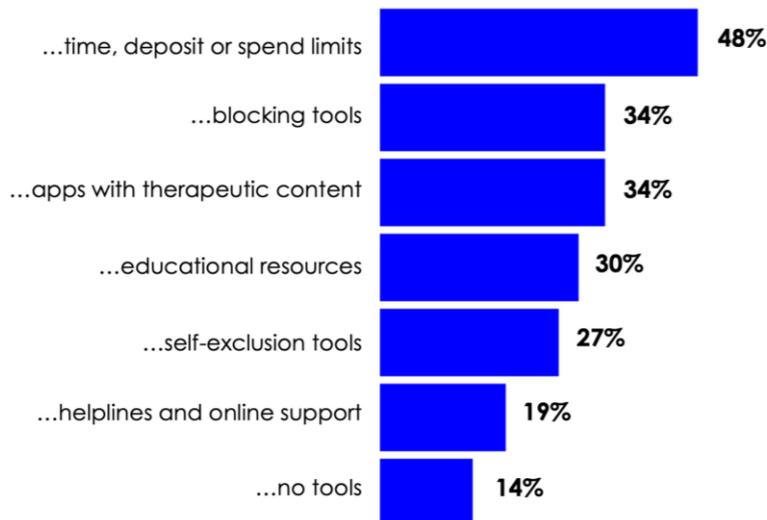
Respondents could choose multiple response options.

Time, deposit or spend limits

Among those who had used operator-provided limits, people were **most likely to have used deposit limits** (Table 5).[21]

People said they used these tools rather than others because of their ability to set clear, enforceable boundaries. These tools are seen as a simple and less intrusive way to manage gambling, offering subtle reminders of time and money spent without feeling overly restrictive.

Similarly, in our qualitative research, those who wanted to reduce or manage their gambling, or feel more in control preferred tools embedded within operator platforms, such as deposit limits, perceiving other tools, like self-exclusion, or using multiple tools as excessive.

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[21] Numbers are for people who have used deposit, time or spend limits in the past 12 months.

Table 5: Popularity of tools

% who said they used… (n = 936)	
…deposit limits	78%
…session time limits	43%
…reality check limits	33%
…loss limits	27%

Challenges

The primary challenge reported with limit based tools was that the default limits tend to be high with people lacking awareness of what an appropriate limit to set is.

Self-exclusion tools

People were **most likely to self-exclude from online gambling sites** (Table 6).

Table 6: Use of self-exclusion

% who said they self-exclude from… (n = 544)	
…online gambling websites (cross-operator exclusion)	64%
…adult gaming centres, high street arcades, motorway service areas and family entertainment	34%
…physical betting shops	32%
…individual gambling operators	30%
…land-based casinos	23%
…land-based bingo premises	21%

Those who use **self-exclusion tools** rather than other tools suggested they enable these in moments of crisis. This aligns with our qualitative findings wherein those who perceived they had a more serious problem or wanted to stop their gambling entirely preferred self-exclusion tools as the highest form of restriction; similarly, they chose self-exclusion when other tools like deposit limits failed to manage their

gambling in the manner they wanted. This may suggest an informal self-imposed 'stepped-care' approach to gambling management, where people progressively opt for higher forms of restriction when more moderate interventions are found not to work for them.

Challenges

- **Concerns around privacy** - e.g., worries that self-exclusion from betting shops would involve their photos.
- **Paid nature of tools** - e,g., the online self-exclusion tool GamBan has a regular subscription cost which can be inaccessible.
- **Difficulties with finding and setting up the tool** - e.g., there being too many different operator-specific self-exclusion schemes, making it a significant effort to find, set up, and track expiry dates.

Blocking tools

Those who used blocking tools (n = 706) were **equally likely to use mobile apps or websites that block gambling payments from their bank account and restrict access to gambling websites** (61% and 59% respectively). People chose these tools for their perceived effectiveness in reducing or managing gambling, particularly in preventing unwanted transactions, and their ease of use.

Demographic differences

Women were 7 percentage points less likely to report using blocking tools compared to men (33% vs. 37%, $p < 0.05$).

Mobile apps with therapeutic content and educational resources

Those who used mobile apps that provide therapeutic content (e.g., the RecoverMe app) (n = 734) were **slightly more likely to use apps that ask about their gambling and give feedback about their behaviour and risk level** (63%) than those that use Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)[22] techniques or ask reflective questions to support behaviour change (55%). This preference aligns with research showing personalised feedback can support behaviour change.

People who used educational resources were **most likely to use YouTube videos or online forums** (Table 7).

Demographic differences

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[22] CBT is a form of therapy that aims to change how the patient thinks and acts. It can be used, among others, to treat gambling-related harm.

Women were 3 percentage points more likely to use mobile apps with therapeutic content than men (38% vs 35%, p < 0.1).

People from ethnic minority backgrounds were more likely to use mobile apps with therapeutic content (46% vs. 31%, *p* < .01) and educational resources (41% vs. 28%, *p* < .01) compared to White people.

Table 7: Frequency of strategy use

% who said they said they used… (n = 650)	
…YouTube videos or online forums like GamCare or Reddit	40%
…downloadable guides, e.g. on how to deal with triggers, manage debt, make a budget, or care for your mental health	38%
…online courses, e.g. on gambling addiction, how to manage risk, or ways to recover	37%
…guides or interactive tools for young people	36%
…apps or quizzes that simulate gambling choices and give you feedback about your risk	34%
…CBT workbooks	28%
…tools to help adults talk to young people about gambling	24%
…educational programs	22%

Challenges

People noted that online forums and educational resources were often taken up as supplementary, supporting tools in addition to other tools like operator tools or self-exclusion. Similarly, survey participants indicated they valued gaining insight into their gambling behaviour, and accessing relevant information, support and practical advice to self-assess and manage their gambling when using apps with therapeutic content or educational resources.

Helplines, online support and GamblersAnonymous

Among those who reported using helplines or online support (n = 410), survey participants were about **equally likely to use helplines offering advice and support (55%), online peer support groups or meetings (51%), and free online services providing live chat, forums, or self-help tools (50%).** They valued direct, human

interaction, particularly when they feel a loss of control or need help managing their gambling.

Demographic differences

People from ethnic minority backgrounds were more likely to use helplines or online support (26% vs. 17%, *p* < .05) than White people.

Challenges

Some people, reflected during the interviews, that the online nature of tools can present challenges to access for those with limited digital skills and experience, and raises concerns regarding privacy and stigma, particularly with group-based support like online support groups.

In addition, while people from our qualitative sample who had used GamblersAnonymous[23] found value in the support they received, they also flagged challenges such as inaccessible meeting locations e.g., those not served by public transportation, forcing reliance on driving or external help and inconvenient scheduling.

Breakdown of tool use by demographics

Where possible with the available data we have reported the following insights by demographics, highlighting key statistically significant differences. This information has also been incorporated into the relevant sub-sections for each tool.

Breakdown by gender

Men were 3 percentage points more likely to report not using any tools compared to women (14% vs 11%, p < 0.05). While we found no gender differences in the reported use of most gambling management tools in our survey, **women were 7 percentage points less likely to report using blocking tools compared to men** (33% vs. 37%, p < 0.05), but were 3 percentage points more likely to use mobile apps with therapeutic content than men (38% vs 35%, p < 0.1).

Figure 5: Proportion of people using each tool, by gender

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[23] We did not ask participants about their usage of GamblersAnonymous in the survey.

Men   Women

N = 2,005 (1,003 women, 1,002 men)
Numbers in bars are weighted proportions
**p < .01, *p < .05, +p < .1
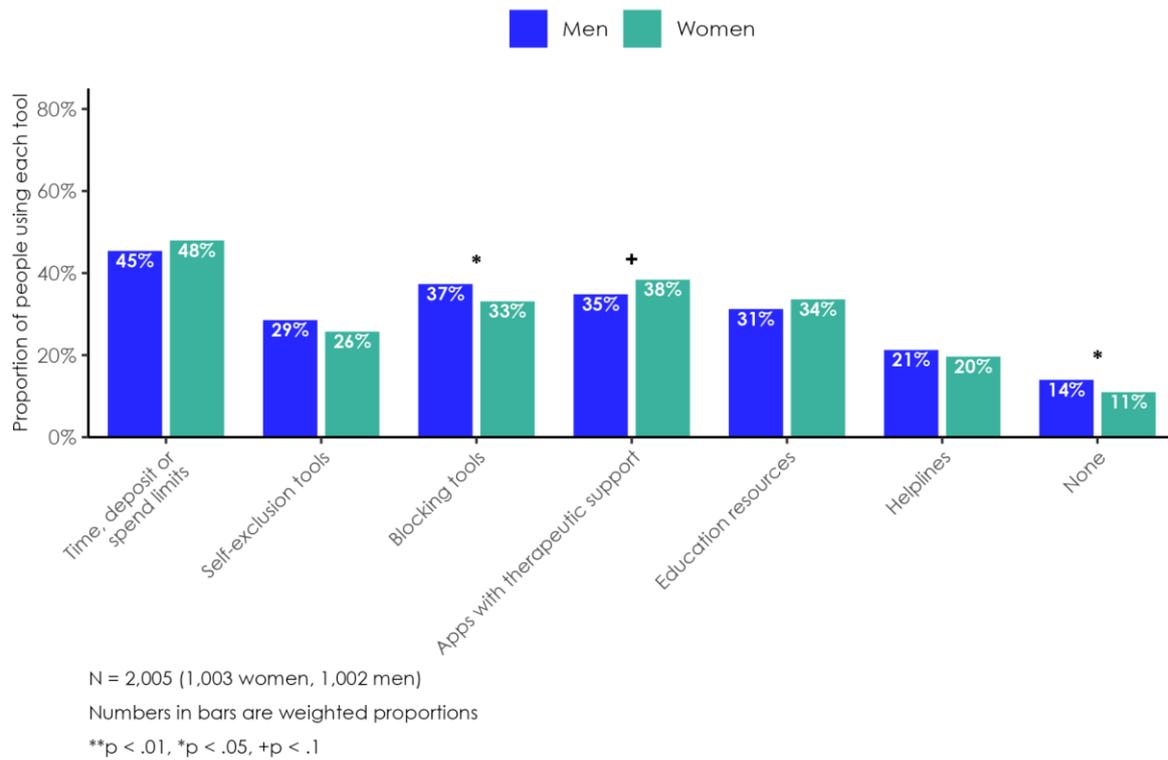
Breakdown by ethnicity

People from ethnic minority backgrounds were 8 percentage points less likely to report using time, deposit or spend limits compared to White people (42% vs. 50%, p < .01). However, they were more likely to use mobile apps with therapeutic content (46% vs. 31%, p < .01), educational resources (41% vs. 28%, p < .01), and helplines or online support (26% vs. 17%, p < .05). No statistically significant differences were found for self-exclusion tools or blocking tools.

Figure 6: Proportion of people using each tool, by ethnicity

N = 2,005 (736 from ethnic minority background, 1,269 from white background)

Numbers in bars are weighted proportions

**p < .01, *p < .05, +p < .1
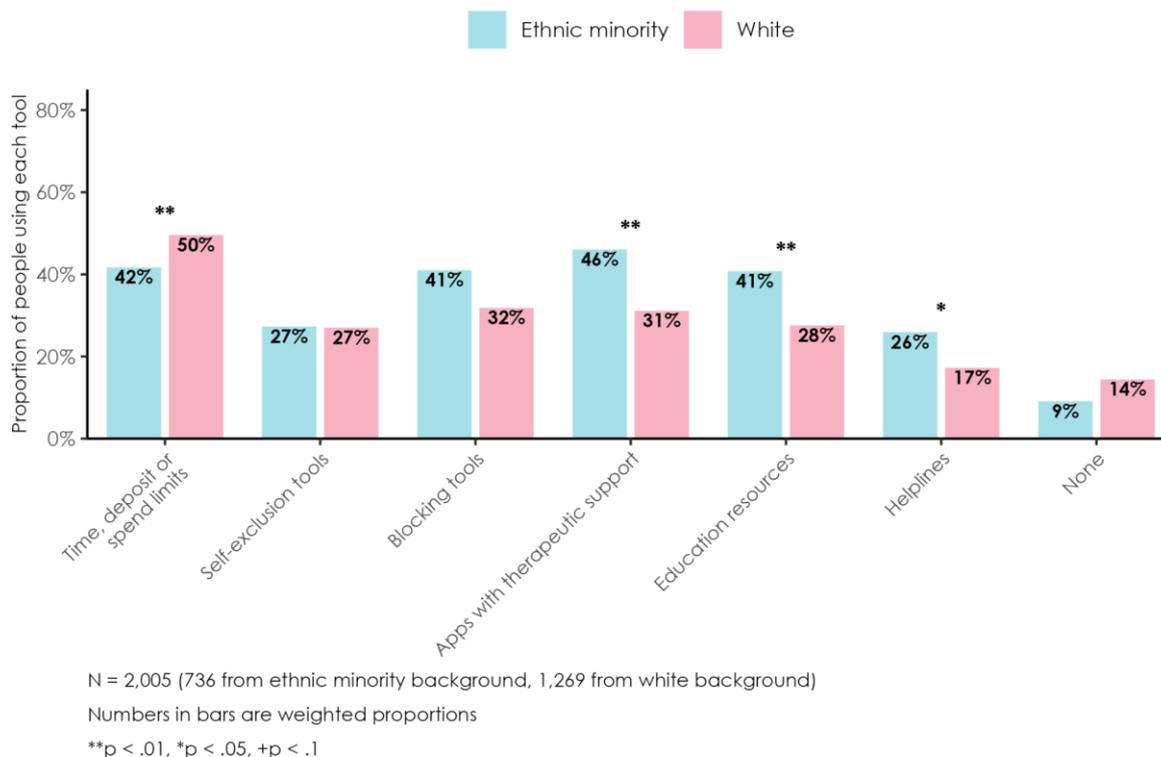
Breakdown by PGSI

Across all tools, those who report moderate (PGSI[24] score 3 - 7) and high risk (PGSI score 8+) gambling were significantly more likely to report using tools than those who experienced no risk of gambling harm (PGSI score 0). They were more likely to report using gambling management tools. No statistically significant differences were found between those who experience no-risk (PGSI score 0) and low-risk gambling (PGSI score 1 - 2), except those engaging in low-risk gambling were significantly more likely to report using tools.

Table 8: Proportion of people using each tool, by PGSI score

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[24] PGSI refers to the Problem Gambling Severity Index which is used to measure the risk of someone experiencing problems from gambling. More information can be found here: https://www.gamblingcommission.gov.uk/statistics-and-research/publication/problem-gambling-screens

Among those in each PGSI category, % who said they use…	1. Non-risk gambling	2. Low risk gambling	3. Moderate risk gambling	4. High risk gambling
	n = 207	n = 188	n = 714	n = 896
…time, deposit or spend limits	41%	46%	**52%**	44%
…self-exclusion tools	16%	20%	**25%**	**33%**
…blocking tools	18%	20%	**33%**	**44%**
…apps with therapeutic content	19%	21%	**38%**	**43%**
…educational resources	16%	21%	**31%**	**39%**
…helplines	6%	11%	**18%**	**27%**
…none	37%	**22%**	**12%**	**5%**

Numbers in the table are weighted proportions.
Data collected by BIT on 16 May - 23 May 2025.
Green (red) text identifies values statistically significantly (p<0.05) higher (lower) than the non-risk gambling group.

Facilitators to uptake

People highlighted several factors that encouraged them to use gambling management tools.

1. Tool Design and Usability

- **People were more likely to use tools that were well-designed**, meaning they were easy and intuitive to find, set up, and use in daily life.
- **They preferred tools that required minimal personal information** during setup.

2. Customisation and Control

- **Users valued being able to choose tools that matched their preferred level of restriction.**
- For example, some chose operator tools like deposit limits because they acted as subtle reminders without feeling overly restrictive.

3. Signposting and Choice

- **Clear and prominent signposting was crucial.** This included easy-to-find safer gambling pages on apps, and information from peer networks like Gamblers Anonymous (GA).

- **Having a range of different tools to choose from** was also highly valued by people.

Barriers to uptake

1. Poor Tool Design

- **Tools were often difficult to set up.** For example, some required a phone call to enable, or it was hard to find the right contact details on gambling websites.
- **Users found some tools easy to get around,** such as land-based self-exclusion schemes.

2. Incomplete Information

Users lacked **clear information**, which acted as a barrier. For example:

- They were unsure if support was available 24/7.
- They did not know how to set up land-based tools or how they worked.
- There was a lack of clear warnings and information about safer gambling support, both online and in land-based venues.

3. Accessibility Issues

- **Support was mostly online,** which excluded people who do not use digital services or primarily gamble in land-based venues.
- **Support hours were often unsuitable,** such as 9-to-5 services for office workers.
- **Phone-based support was not accessible** for people who were keeping their gambling hidden from family.

4. Personal Preferences and Needs

- **Some users preferred human connection** for self-reflection, rather than using a chatbot or diary.
- **Some tools were not seen as effective,** such as educational materials that did not directly restrict gambling.
- **Users had concerns about anonymity** in tools like online forums.
- **Some associated reflective tools** like diaries with school, which they disliked.
- **Finally, some were satisfied with their existing tools** and felt no need to find others.

This aligns closely with our survey findings from people who did not use the listed tools in the past 12 months, as seen in Table 9.

Table 9: Reasons for not using tools

Among those who said they did <u>not</u> use these tools in the past 12 months, % who said they did not use them because…	Time, deposit or spend limits	Self-exclusion tools	Blocking tools	Apps with therapeutic content	Educational resources	Helplines
	n = 200	n = 210	n = 329	n = 340	n = 298	n = 185
…they didn't know the tools existed, or how to find and set them up	22%	20%	18%	19%	18%	16%
…they mainly gamble in physical places where the tools are harder to find or use	22%	18%	16%	14%	N/A	N/A
…they found the tools/ resources too general or not helpful enough	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	25%	23%
…they prefer face-to-face support than online support	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	20%	22%
…they don't have the digital skills to set up the tools online	13%	12%	14%	13%	N/A	N/A
…they do not think the tools would help them manage or reduce gambling	29%	29%	27%	29%	28%	26%
…it's easy to bypass the tools or keep gambling elsewhere	27%	26%	26%	24%	26%	22%
…they don't want to be judged for using the tools/ resources	21%	18%	16%	18%	20%	25%
…they worried about how their data would be used	25%	23%	23%	22%	N/A	N/A
Numbers in the table are weighted means, adjusted for gender and ethnicity. Data collected by BIT on 16 May - 23 May 2025. N/A refers to no data available through participant responses						

Key reflections

The key barriers to uptake relate to tool design and accessibility, and people's perceptions of tools; suggesting that tool designs need to be further refined to meet user needs. If people do not think the available options are effective or well-designed, they will lack motivation to use them.

However, personal preferences around tools - for example, preferring human connection over a chatbot- indicate that people need a range of different tools to choose from in order to meet their needs and feel supported.

Uptake of strategies

People stated they mainly used the specific strategies they were aware of such as getting trusted individuals (e.g., partner, family) involved in financial matters, avoiding triggers or exposure to gambling, and setting limits or budgeting (on their own, without the help of a specific tool or platform).

In our survey, setting limits or goals was the most commonly used strategy.

Figure 7: Strategies used to manage or reduce gambling

Strategies people typically use to manage or reduce their gambling

(n = 2,005)

Strategy	%
…setting limits or goals, including planning how to handle urges, and using reminders to not gamble	47%
…avoiding triggers, such as avoiding areas with betting shops or deleting gambling emails	36%
…setting a gambling-free time and/or space	30%
…talking to family or close friends	28%
…mindfulness and relaxation strategies	27%
…getting trusted individuals (e.g., partner, family) involved in financial matters	26%
…watching videos by people who used to experience gambling harms	23%
…no strategies	5%

Respondents could choose multiple response options.

Set limits or goals, or use reminders not to gamble

The main reason people set limits or goals or use reminders not to gamble was because **it helps them feel more structured or disciplined about their gambling (56%)**. Furthermore, 48% reported they do so because it gives them a target to work towards or helps them track progress — this aligns with our finding from qualitative research that people struggle to estimate how much money has been spent on gambling (see Table 10 for further details).

Table 10: Reasons for setting limits and goals or using reminders

Among the 970 people who set limits or goals, or use reminders not to gamble, % who said this is because:	
56%	It helps me feel more structured or disciplined about my gambling
48%	It gives me a target to work toward or helps me track progress
32%	It's worked in the past
25%	Someone I trust or a support service recommended it

As shown on Figure 8, most people said that setting limits or goals would be helpful when feeling like their gambling is harder to control.

Figure 8: Proportion of people saying it could be helpful to set limits or goals or use reminders in specific situations

% who say it could be helpful to set limits or goals, or use reminders to not gamble in the following situations
(n = 2,005)

When I feel like my gambling is becoming harder to control	28%
After I've experienced harm from gambling	24%
When I've just been paid or have access to money	24%
When I know I'll be alone or bored	22%
When I know I'll be exposed to gambling (e.g. ads)	22%
When I'm starting a new week or month (e.g., as part of budgeting or planning)	21%
When I'm feeling stressed or anxious	21%
As part of my daily routine	19%
I don't find it helpful in any situation	6%

Those who said they do not set limits or goals, or use reminders not to gamble said **they prefer to be flexible rather than set rules**, while others also say that they find it hard to stick to limits, goals, or plans that they set, even with reminders, or that this strategy did not work for them.

Demographic differences[25]

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[25] Where available from our survey, this information has been included.

Those engaging in moderate risk (PGSI[26] score 3 - 7) and high risk (PGSI score 8+) gambling were significantly more likely to set goals compared to those engaging in non-risk gambling.

Identify triggers and make a conscious effort to avoid them

The main reason people made a conscious effort to identify triggers and avoid them was to **reduce the temptation to gamble**, while many others also recognised that certain situations or emotions lead them to gamble (see Table 11).

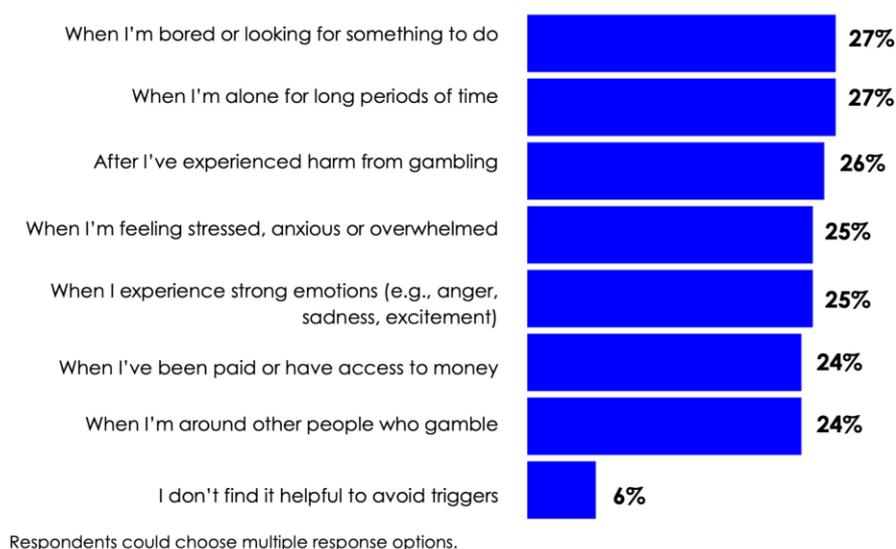Table 11: Reasons for identifying and avoiding triggers

Among the 763 people who said they identify triggers and make a conscious effort to avoid them, % who said this is:	
54%	To reduce the temptation to gamble
50%	Because I've noticed certain situations or emotions lead me to gamble
43%	I've learned about the importance of avoiding triggers through support or treatment

In regard to when making a conscious effort to identify and avoid triggers would be helpful, people reported when feeling bored, being alone for long periods of time or after experiencing harm from gambling (see Figure 9).

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[26] PGSI refers to the Problem Gambling Severity Index which is used to measure the risk of someone experiencing gambling harm. More information can be found here: https://www.gamblingcommission.gov.uk/statistics-and-research/publication/problem-gambling-screens

Figure 9: When it could be helpful to identify and avoid triggers

When it could be helpful to identify triggers and make a conscious effort to avoid them
(n = 2,005)

When I'm bored or looking for something to do	27%
When I'm alone for long periods of time	27%
After I've experienced harm from gambling	26%
When I'm feeling stressed, anxious or overwhelmed	25%
When I experience strong emotions (e.g., anger, sadness, excitement)	25%
When I've been paid or have access to money	24%
When I'm around other people who gamble	24%
I don't find it helpful to avoid triggers	6%

Respondents could choose multiple response options.

Those who said they do not make a conscious effort to identify triggers and avoid them said this is because **they do not believe their gambling is triggered by specific situations or emotions**, while many also said they had not thought about doing this before.

Demographic differences

People from ethnic minority backgrounds were significantly more likely to report avoiding triggers (p < .05) compared to White people.

Those engaging in moderate risk (PGSI score 3 - 7) and high risk (PGSI score 8+) gambling were significantly more likely to avoid triggers compared to those engaging in non-risk gambling. Those gambling with low risk (PGSI score 1 - 2) were also more likely to make an effort to avoid triggers, compared to those engaging in non-risk gambling (PGSI score 0).

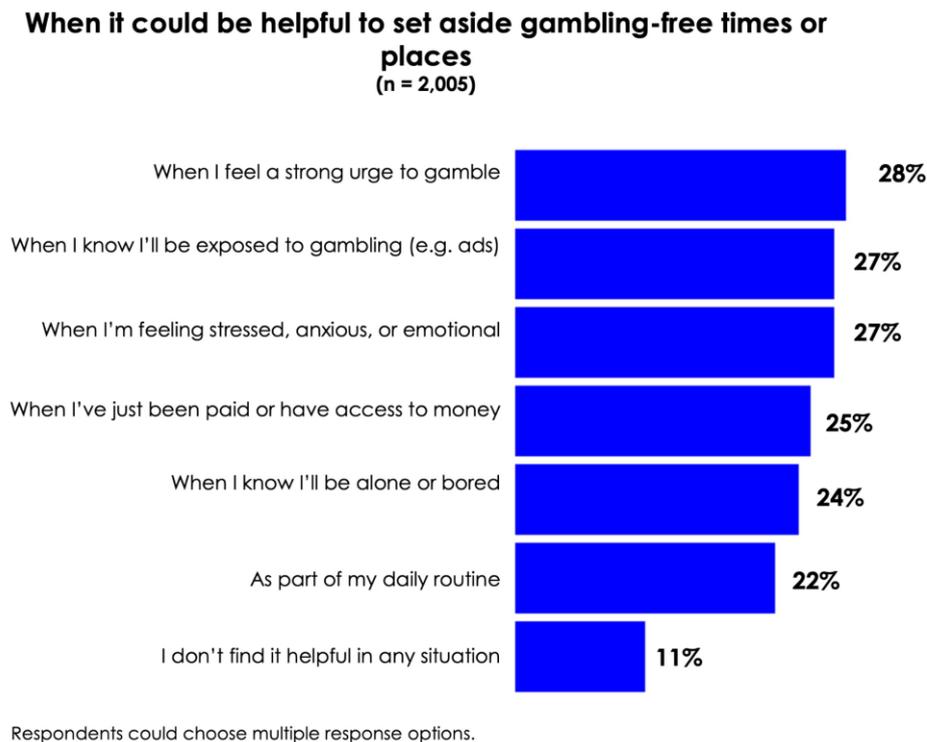## Set aside gambling-free times or places

The main reason people set aside gambling-free times or places was **to establish clearer boundaries around their gambling**. Many also found that doing so helped reduce temptation and made it easier to manage their behaviour by limiting gambling to specific times or locations (see Table 12). This suggests that the primary motivation for using gambling-free spaces and times is to set clear limits, rather than to create overall structure or routine in their daily lives.

Table 12: Reasons for setting aside gambling-free times and places

Among the 620 people who set aside gambling-free times or places, % who said this is because:	
44%	It gives me clearer boundaries around my gambling
43%	To reduce temptation or opportunities to gamble
42%	I find it easier to manage my gambling when I limit it to specific times or places
40%	To protect time for other activities (e.g. family, work, rest)
37%	To help create structure and routine in my day

Most people said that setting aside gambling-free times or places would be helpful when they feel a strong urge to gamble, or when they know they'll be exposed to gambling (see Figure 10).

Figure 10: When it could be helpful to set aside gambling-free times or places

When it could be helpful to set aside gambling-free times or places
(n = 2,005)

Response	Percentage
When I feel a strong urge to gamble	28%
When I know I'll be exposed to gambling (e.g. ads)	27%
When I'm feeling stressed, anxious, or emotional	27%
When I've just been paid or have access to money	25%
When I know I'll be alone or bored	24%
As part of my daily routine	22%
I don't find it helpful in any situation	11%

Respondents could choose multiple response options.

Those who said they do not set aside gambling-free times or places said **they had not thought about doing this before**, or they did not think this strategy would help them.

Demographic differences

People from ethnic minority backgrounds were significantly more likely to report setting aside gamble-free times and places ($p < .05$) compared to White people.

Speaking to friends and family about gambling

The main reason people talked to their family and friends about their gambling was that **they were the only people they could be open and honest with about how gambling had affected them** (Table 13). However, most survey participants selected more than one reason for talking to their family and friends, suggesting that family and friends play multiple, complementary roles in supporting individuals who gamble, including emotional support, accountability, and help with stress.

Table 13: Reasons for talking to family and friends

Among the 585 people who reported talking to their family and friends to manage or reduce their gambling, % who said this is because:	
52%	They're the only people I can be open and honest with about my gambling and how it has affected me
49%	They talk to me, ask me questions and support me when I'm struggling or things change
47%	They help hold me accountable for reducing or managing my gambling
45%	They help reduce my anxiety or stress

Mindfulness and relaxation strategies

The main reason people use mindfulness and relaxation strategies was **to improve their overall wellbeing and mental health**, while many others also said that they help to manage stress and anxiety (Table 14). While ease of use and exposure through therapy, apps, or support services play a role, the key motivation appears to be the mental health benefits these strategies offer.

Table 14: Reasons for using mindfulness and relaxation strategies

Among the 574 people who use mindfulness and relaxation strategies, % who said this is:	
56%	To improve my overall wellbeing and mental health
52%	They help me manage my stress and anxiety
38%	They're easy to use when I need them
35%	I've learned these techniques through therapy, apps, or support services

Most people said that mindfulness or relaxation techniques would be most helpful when feeling stressed, anxious or overwhelmed (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Proportion of people saying it could be helpful to use mindfulness and relaxation strategies in specific situations

% who say it could be helpful to use mindfulness and relaxation strategies in the following situations
(n = 2,005)

Situation	%
When I feel stressed, anxious or overwhelmed	36%
As part of a regular routine to support my wellbeing	31%
When I'm struggling with sleep, focus, or emotions	30%
Before or after situations that usually trigger gambling	29%
I don't find it helpful in any situation	18%

Those who said they do not use mindfulness and relaxation strategies reported **being unfamiliar with these techniques.** 30% also found them hard to stick with or thought they would not be helpful.

Demographic differences

Men were significantly less likely to report **using relaxation techniques** (27% vs. 30%, *p* < .05) compared to women.

People from ethnic minority backgrounds were significantly more likely to report using relaxation techniques (*p* < .05) compared to White people. They were also more likely to involve others in financial matters (*p* < .1).

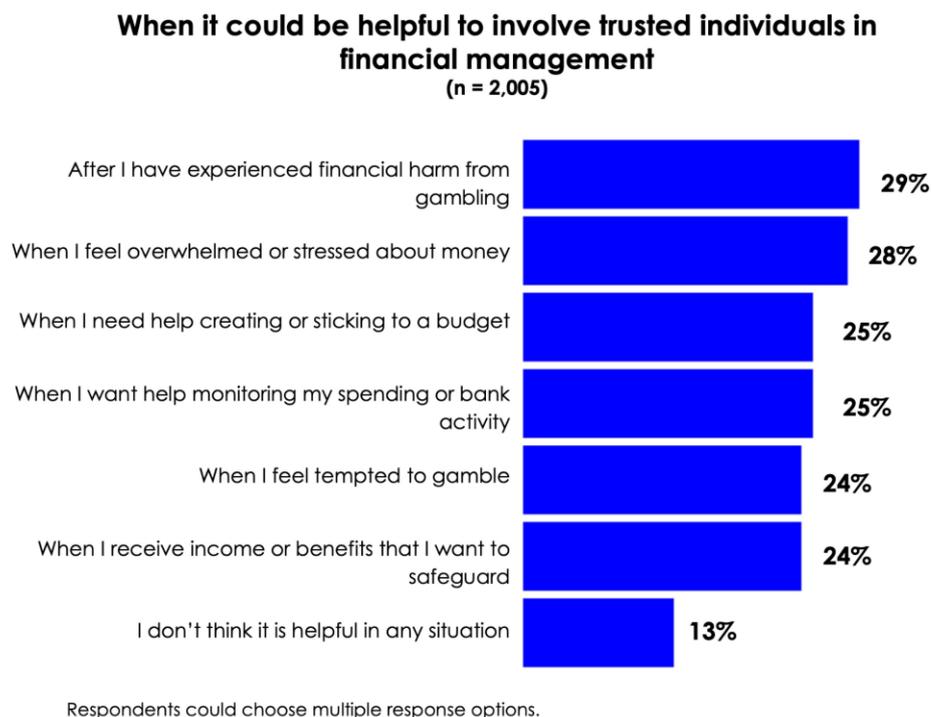### Involving trusted individuals in financial management

The main reason people involved trusted individuals in financial management was to **help control the amount of money they spend on gambling**, while many also said they wanted someone to hold them accountable and reduce the risk of gambling impulsively (Table 15).

Table 15: Reasons for involving trusted individuals and financial management

Among the 540 people who reported involving trusted individuals in financial management, % who said this is:	
47%	To help me control the amount of money I spend on gambling
45%	To hold me accountable for spending less money on gambling
44%	To reduce the risk of gambling impulsively
38%	Because I've had financial problems due to gambling in the past (e.g. went into debt, lost savings)
35%	For general financial support, i.e. not related to gambling specifically

Approximately 30% of respondents said that involving trusted individuals in financial matters would be helpful after experiencing financial harm from gambling (Figure 12). Many also said it would be helpful when feeling overwhelmed or stressed about money, or when needing support to create or stick to a budget.

When it could be helpful to involve trusted individuals in financial management
(n = 2,005)

After I have experienced financial harm from gambling	29%
When I feel overwhelmed or stressed about money	28%
When I need help creating or sticking to a budget	25%
When I want help monitoring my spending or bank activity	25%
When I feel tempted to gamble	24%
When I receive income or benefits that I want to safeguard	24%
I don't think it is helpful in any situation	13%

Respondents could choose multiple response options.

Those who did not involve trusted individuals in financial management said **they preferred to manage their finances independently and did not feel comfortable sharing financial information**. This suggests that self-reliance and privacy concerns may be key barriers to involving others in financial management.

Demographic differences

People from ethnic minority backgrounds were more likely to involve others in financial matters ($p < .1$) compared to White people.

Those engaging in moderate risk (PGSI score 3 - 7) and high risk (PGSI score 8+) gambling were significantly more likely to involve others in financial matters compared to those engaging in non-risk gambling. Those gambling with low risk (PGSI score 1 - 2) were also more likely to involve others in financial matters compared to those engaging in non-risk gambling (PGSI score 0).

Watch videos by people who have experienced gambling harm

The main reason people watch videos by people who have experienced gambling harm was **to understand the impact of gambling on themselves and others** (Table 16).

Table 16: Reasons for watch videos by people who have experienced gambling harms

Among the 497 people who watch videos by people who have experienced gambling harm, % who said this is because:	
41%	It helps me understand the impact of gambling on myself or others
39%	I find it motivating to hear how others have overcome similar struggles
37%	It helps me feel less alone in my experience
36%	I find real-life stories more relatable than professional advice
35%	It helps me reflect on my own gambling behaviours
34%	It reminds me why I want to reduce or manage my gambling
34%	I learn practical tips and strategies from people who've been through it

Most people said that watching videos by people who've experienced gambling-related harms would be most helpful when they feel like they are losing motivation to reduce or manage their gambling (Figure 13).

Figure 13: When it could be helpful to watch videos by people who have experienced gambling harm

When it could be helpful to watch videos by people who've experienced gambling harm
(n = 2,005)

When I feel like I'm losing motivation to reduce or manage my gambling	33%
When I need encouragement	27%
When I've had a setback or gambling slip	24%
When I'm feeling alone or misunderstood	24%
As part of a regular routine	20%
I don't find it helpful in any situation	19%

Respondents could choose multiple response options.

Those who said they do not watch videos by people who have experienced gambling harm said **they did not think doing this would be helpful to them.**

Demographic differences

Men were significantly less likely to report **watching videos by people with experience of gambling-related harm** (23% vs. 27%, $p < .05$), compared to women.

People from ethnic minority backgrounds were significantly more likely to report watching videos by people with experience of gambling-related harm ($p < .05$) compared to White people.
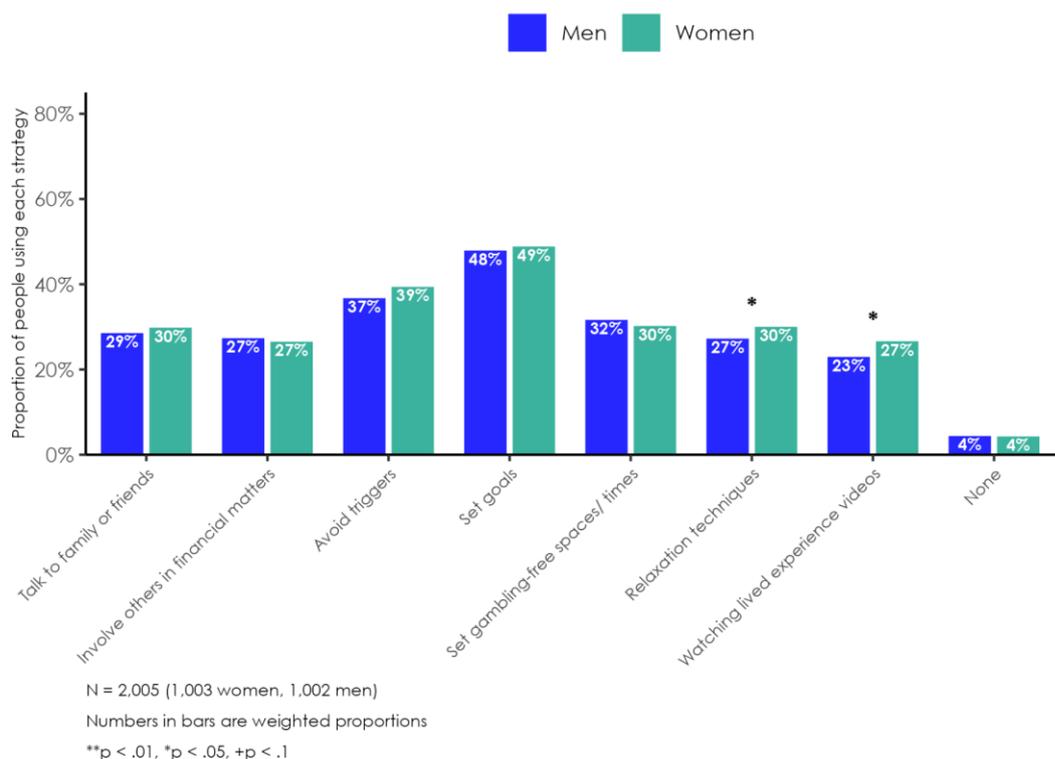
Those engaging in moderate risk (PGSI score 3 - 7) and high risk (PGSI score 8+) gambling were significantly more likely to watch videos by those with lived experience of harm, compared to those engaging in non-risk gambling.

Uptake of strategies by demographics

Findings by gender

Men were significantly less likely to report **using relaxation techniques** (27% vs. 30%, $p < .05$) **or watching videos by people with experience of gambling-related harm** (23% vs. 27%, $p < .05$), compared to women. No other statistically significant differences were found.
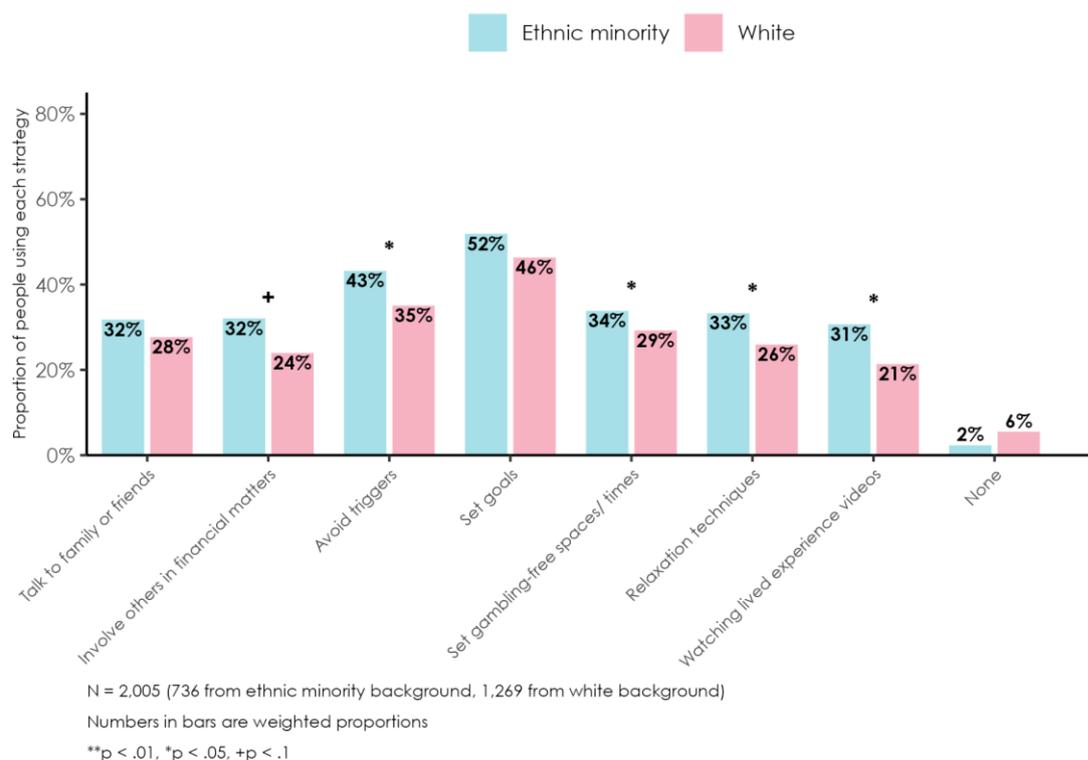
Figure 14: Proportion of people using each strategy, by gender

Men ■ Women ■

Proportion of people using each strategy

- Talk to family or friends: 29% (Men), 30% (Women)
- Involve others in financial matters: 27% (Men), 27% (Women)
- Avoid triggers: 37% (Men), 39% (Women)
- Set goals: 48% (Men), 49% (Women)
- Set gambling-free spaces/ times: 32% (Men), 30% (Women)
- Relaxation techniques: 27% (Men), 30% (Women) *
- Watching lived experience videos: 23% (Men), 27% (Women) *
- None: 4% (Men), 4% (Women)

N = 2,005 (1,003 women, 1,002 men)

Numbers in bars are weighted proportions

**$p < .01$, *$p < .05$, +$p < .1$

Findings by ethnicity

People from ethnic minority backgrounds were significantly more likely to report avoiding triggers, setting aside gamble-free times and places, using relaxation techniques, and watching videos by people with experience of gambling-related harm ($p < .05$) compared to White people. They were also more likely to involve others in financial matters ($p < .1$). No other significant differences were found.

Figure 15: Proportion of people using each strategy, by ethnicity

N = 2,005 (736 from ethnic minority background, 1,269 from white background)

Numbers in bars are weighted proportions

**p < .01, *p < .05, +p < .1

Findings by PGSI

Those engaging in moderate risk (PGSI[27] score 3 - 7) and high risk (PGSI score 8+) gambling were significantly more likely to involve others in financial matters, avoid triggers, set goals and watch videos by those with lived experience of harm, compared to those engaging in non-risk gambling. Those gambling with low risk (PGSI score 1 - 2) were also more likely to involve others in financial matters and make an effort to avoid triggers, compared to those engaging in non-risk gambling (PGSI score 0). No significant differences were found for setting aside gambling-free spaces or times and using relaxation techniques.

Table 17: Proportion of people using each strategy, by PGSI score

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[27] PGSI refers to the Problem Gambling Severity Index which is used to measure the risk of someone experiencing gambling harm. More information can be found here: https://www.gamblingcommission.gov.uk/statistics-and-research/publication/problem-gambling-screens

Among those in each PGSI category, % who said they…	1. Non-risk gambling	2. Low risk gambling	3. Moderate risk gambling	4. High risk gambling
	n = 207	n = 188	n = 714	n = 896
…talk to family and friends	21%	22%	28%	**33%**
…involve others in financial matters	11%	**20%**	**23%**	**35%**
…avoid triggers	21%	**29%**	**39%**	**43%**
…set goals	36%	38%	**53%**	**50%**
…set gambling-free spaces/ times	30%	32%	34%	28%
…use relaxation techniques	25%	28%	30%	29%
…watch lived experience videos	13%	15%	**23%**	**31%**
…none	20%	**8%**	**3%**	**1%**

Numbers in the table are weighted proportions.
Data collected by BIT on 16 May - 23 May 2025.
Green (red) text identifies values statistically significantly (p<0.05) higher (lower) than the non-risk gambling group.

Similar to their approach with tools, people chose strategies based on their specific needs. For example, they would:

- **Ask trusted people to help manage their finances** to control their gambling spend.
- **Set limits or goals for themselves** to feel more structured and disciplined.[28]

People who used only these types of strategies often **felt they were sufficient.** They assumed their gambling concerns were not serious enough to require formal tools.

Key Reflections

Our data indicates that people choose strategies based on what they think they need. However, they may face barriers such as:

(1) They may not be aware of all the strategies available.
(2) They might not fully understand their needs.

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[28] Detailed reasons for the selection of each strategy are listed in Appendix B.

(3) They might struggle to match strategies to their needs.

This means, for example, a person might use the only strategy they know, even if it is not the most effective one for them. **Therefore, it is vital to equip individuals to understand the range of tools and strategies available to them, assess their needs, and choose the most appropriate support option.**

Reasons for not choosing strategies

In our survey, people who do not currently use strategies noted that they were least likely to use strategies involving support from social networks (43% of respondents), relaxation techniques (36%), or watching videos of people with lived experience (43%), saying they would be unlikely or very unlikely to try them (see table 16). In comparison, people were more likely to try strategies focused on avoiding triggers (70%), setting goals (69%), and setting gambling-free times/places (69%).

Concerns around involving support from social networks included preferences to manage their gambling and associated finances independently or worries about privacy when involving others. As highlighted above, people may also fear facing stigma or judgement from others.

Awareness was a key barrier to using mindfulness and relaxation techniques, with people being unfamiliar with them, as well as concerns around their effectiveness. Similarly, people express scepticism about the usefulness of watching videos of people with lived experience.

Table 18: Proportion of people who have not used a strategy but would likely use

Likelihood of use	Family and friends	Financial management	Triggers	Goals	Gamble-free times/ places	Mindfulness	Videos
	n = 1,333	n = 1,378	n = 1,155	n = 948	n = 1,298	n = 1,344	n = 1,421
…Very unlikely	13%	13%	5%	6%	6%	11%	15%
…Unlikely	30%	28%	17%	18%	18%	25%	28%
…Likely	32%	35%	44%	42%	44%	36%	34%
…Very likely	20%	16%	26%	27%	25%	21%	16%
…Not sure	5%	7%	8%	7%	8%	7%	7%

Relationship between self-directed support and professional support

People could be seen as choosing self-directed support over professional support as a result of both their own preference and in response to barriers experienced:

- **Genuine preferences:** These represent an individual's active choice to use self-directed support based on its perceived benefits or their own self-efficacy.
    - **Successful use of self-directed support** so having no need to supplement or switch to professional support
    - **Feasibility and manageability:** Viewing self-directed support as better suited to their specific circumstances
    - **Autonomy:** A clear preference for managing their issues alone

- **Barriers:** These represent internal or external obstacles that prevent a person from seeking professional help, even if it might be beneficial:
    - **Minimisation:** Perceiving their harm as "not serious enough" to warrant support
    - **Fear of legitimisation:** A concern that seeking professional help would cement their problems as being more real and serious than they were comfortable admitting to.
    - **Past negative experiences with professionals:** A feeling that professional support wasn't effective or any longer necessary to support them.

However, some people still saw a clear role for professional help, for example, seeing it as complementing self-directed support. Others preferred it outright for three main reasons:

- They wanted to address the underlying or root causes of their gambling harm.
- They were still experiencing negative consequences of gambling, even after using self-directed support.
- They valued the emotional support professionals could provide.

Some people appreciated knowing that support options are available and expressed a willingness to use professional help now or in the future. They would consider it if self-directed tools became insufficient or if they relapsed.

In contrast, others felt they would have benefited from such support in the past but no longer needed it. They suggested that it would have been more effective if offered proactively, for example, by casino staff.

Key Reflections

People partially based their decision to choose between professional and self-directed support on self-identification of harm.

In our interviews with experts in the gambling support and treatment space in the previous phase of the project,[29] they highlighted that **some people experiencing harm need more formal, intensive support, particularly those with underlying mental health issues or dependency.** As with the selection of tools and strategies, highlighted above, it is important to help people to choose the type of support that best aligns with their needs. This reinforces the importance of:

- **Increasing awareness** of the full range of SDTS available.
- **Formalising these strategies** to provide a structured pathway for people to use the SDTS most relevant to their circumstances

Successful uptake of any SDTS is an important first step, however, the long-term effectiveness of these supports depends on an individual's ability to stay engaged. The factors influencing people's ability to stay engaged with SDTS related to tool design and effectiveness, people's behaviour and their external environment.

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[29] We conducted 6 interviews with academic experts and experts from relevant prevention treatment organisations within the gambling and other relevant sectors (such as alcohol use, substance use, and mental health challenges).

4) Staying engaged with tools and strategies

Effective design and accessibility

Our research found that a key challenge to engagement is when tools are too easy to circumvent or amend. Engagement is defined in this section in relation to whether people were able to show sustained use of a tool or strategy.

People were more likely to stay engaged with tools that were designed to be difficult to get around, having features such as:

- Built-in barriers to make bypassing them difficult (e.g., Gamstop).
- 'Friction' for deactivation, such as cool-down periods or requiring a conversation with a support agent.

People reported broader structural or systemic issues that tools were not designed to address, subsequently impacting engagement. This was a particular problem for land-based gambling, where people could bypass self-exclusion schemes in several ways:

- Travelling to venues in different areas not covered by the scheme.
- Taking advantage of staff who struggled to track who was excluded.
- Exploiting inconsistent ID checks in casinos.

This problem also applies to online tools. For example, a person could set a limit on one gambling app, but then simply switch to another app or gamble in person after hitting that limit.

Similarly, engagement was negatively impacted by tools that are easy to amend, particularly online tools like limits. These tools allow changes without cooldown periods or reset at short intervals like a week.

Although, it was not clear in the data here, whether circumvention was a result of intentional looking for workarounds, impulsive moments or a gap in operator design, the outcome remained the same; people who may have intended not to gamble were able to.

Friction in renewal processes negatively impacted engagement. People spoke about tools requiring renewal triggering relapses: e.g., while Gamstop now is

designed to automatically renew, earlier it had to be manually renewed every 5 years, causing people to relapse. If an individual was using multiple self-exclusion schemes, it was difficult to keep track of renewal requirements.

Lastly, tools that do not restrict gambling, but provide information - such as reality checks or educational materials - were reported during the interviews as being easy to ignore, therefore having limited long-term impacts on gambling. This made staying engaged in using them challenging.

These findings aligned with our survey findings (Table 19). The most important considerations around no longer using different tools were related to perceived effectiveness in reducing or managing gambling, the ease with which they can be bypassed, and a perception that they could control their gambling without the tool(s).

Table 19: Specific reasons for not using tools

Among those who no longer use these tools, % who say this was because…	Time, deposit or spend limits	Self-exclusion tools	Blocking tools	Apps with therapeutic content	Educational resources	Helplines
	n = 200	n = 210	n = 329	n = 340	n = 298	n = 185
… the tools(s) were too easy to ignore	27%	22%	27%	28%	30%	31%
… they found it too difficult to set or maintain the tool(s)/ hard to stay motivated or keep using them over time	16%	16%	15%	16%	26%	27%
…they preferred using other tools or strategies	21%	20%	24%	24%	26%	23%
…they forgot to set the tools, let their self-exclusion period expire without renewing it, or forgot to update or reinstall their blocking tools	21%	34%	19%	16%	19%	22%
…they didn't fully understand how the tool(s) worked	12%	17%	16%	19%	23%	23%
…they were worried about how their data would be used	19%	12%	21%	23%	N/A	N/A
…they thought they could control their gambling without the tool(s)	37%	28%	34%	26%	29%	27%

Key Reflections

Poor tool design creates a barrier across multiple stages of the user journey:

- **Motivation:** Poor design may diminish the perceived efficacy of a tool, for example if they can easily find ways to circumvent it, they may lose trust in its ability to support them.
- **Uptake:** Complicated user journeys or added friction can increase the barriers to use. If initial effort to use a tool is high, potential users may be less likely to experiment with it.
- **Engagement:** Tools that require high cognitive load or repeated manual involvement may be less appealing to users, especially as time passes, if they are unable to build into their routines.

People highlighted the importance of **making it more difficult to circumvent or amend tools** by implementing positive frictions like cool-down periods.

Behavioural factors

People highlighted a range of behavioural facilitators to engagement:

- **Integrating tools and strategies into a daily routine.** Integrating tools and strategies into a daily routine was found to be most effective when the cognitive load associated with self-regulation was minimised. Participants found this easier with 'set and forget' tools that ran in the background; by automating the monitoring process, these tools removed the need for constant active decision-making. Over time, having these tools (such as operator tools) in place became their 'new normal,' transitioning from a conscious effort to a seamless part of their environment.

- **Accounting for the psychological impacts of tool and strategy use.** This included gradually decreasing gambling limits and spending, as well as addressing root causes of harm, such as mental health challenges or substance use.

- **Staying connected to original motivations.** People achieved this by tracking progress towards self-set goals like saving money, improving relationships, and reducing gambling spend and frequency. Saving for a specific event, such as a holiday or wedding, was particularly helpful as it provided something positive to anticipate.

- **Perceiving positive impacts from engagement.** This involved feeling an increased sense of control over their gambling, alongside improved mental health and financial stability. (See Section 5 for more detailed findings on positive impacts).

Given the available data we were unable to identify specific patterns amongst individual demographic groups here.

Key Reflections

Equipping individuals to visually keep **track of their progress against their original motivations can create positive feedback loops** and help sustain engagement. For example, tools can be designed to help visualise progress against set goals (e.g., through trackers), or provide personalised feedback, or small rewards and incentives to help people sustain engagement.

However, some people noted that there were behavioural barriers that impacted engagement as well. A key factor was difficulty fighting the impulsivity to gamble or maintaining the self-control required for continued engagement. Other behavioural barriers highlighted included:

- **Unintended side-effects.** Restricting gambling triggered challenging negative emotions like frustration, anxiety, or boredom. These feelings, in turn, pushed individuals to circumvent support tools or use unregulated websites. Furthermore, some seemingly "safer" strategies, like only using free bets, paradoxically motivated and extended gambling behaviour.[30]
- **A false sense of security.** Some people, after seeing initial progress, prematurely assumed they had recovered and stopped using their tools and strategies. This often led to a relapse, as they were no longer protected by the support that had been helping them.

However, there were also a range of external behavioural drivers that impacted self-control. These included structural environmental factors and system or product designs, which influenced behaviour:

- **The degree of integration of gambling into daily life.** When gambling was a regular long-standing activity, especially over many years, resisting the impulse to gamble was harder. For example, people described buying scratch cards out of habit or automatically slipping back into the routine of

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[30] The term "free bet" is often considered misleading. Such promotions, along with other promotional offers like deposit bonuses, typically carry complex terms and conditions. These often include wagering requirements or minimum deposits that are not transparently communicated, potentially encouraging harmful or extended gambling.

depositing money into their accounts, even when they consciously were trying to avoid these actions.

- **Constant exposure to gambling.** People felt overwhelmed by the 24/7 availability of online gambling, the high number of land-based betting shops around them, and the constant stream of promotions and ads, online and offline. Major sports events like Cheltenham and key football matches, as well as promotions for large jackpots significantly increased the temptation to bet. This made self-control difficult to maintain, as triggers were everywhere.

- **Choice architecture of the gambling environment.** The design of gambling products and venues often encourages higher spending and less conscious decision-making. For example, casino ATMs frequently default to large withdrawal amounts like £300 or £500, making it difficult to choose a smaller sum. Similarly, some games do not require active betting or playing from individuals, but simply making a deposit, which run in the background and require additional effort from people to exit. These structural design choices create additional barriers for people wanting to stop or reduce their gambling.

- **Boredom with tools or strategies.** The effectiveness of tools and strategies could wane over time for individuals. Some people reported that alternative activities became repetitive or that support methods.

Key Reflections

People using SDST experience ups and downs in their journey with managing gambling harm. **Equipping people to be aware of and prepared for this level of cognitive effort is key, particularly highlighting that support and recovery is not a linear journey.** There should be acknowledgement that motivation and engagement may vary throughout the process, and additional support may be needed. Resources should be created that provide clear ways for people to plan for and manage the psychological challenges of their recovery journey, and normalise that people may need to try multiple different approaches.

Social environment

People's social networks played an important role in facilitating engagement, for example, by providing direct encouragement, support, and camaraderie. An important way in which social networks facilitated engagement was partners' and spouses' involvement in budgeting strategies. Participants reported that their partners suggested regular financial check-ins, or offered to take control of the household finances to help monitor and follow reduction strategies.

Social networks may also increase exposure to gambling. For example, hearing friends and family discuss their wins or seeing them gamble while watching sports normalised gambling. This in turn, lessened people's concerns about their own gambling and impacted their engagement with support. In some cases, people were concerned that friends and family might question their decision to stop gambling or use support tools. Descriptive norms may also play a role here, if an individual overestimates how much their family or peer group gambling, resulting in themselves gambling more, in order to identify with that group.

This link between socialising and gambling led some to make difficult choices, such as missing social events that involved group bets or bingo, which had negative social effects. They found it hard to decline gambling invitations from friends who were aware of their efforts to cut back.

However, some people reported no social barriers. They said they were not influenced by others or made to feel judged, stigmatised, or pressured to gamble. One person noted they felt excitement from others betting without feeling encouraged to join in but recognised that social pressure could be a barrier for others. Another suggested that increased awareness of gambling-related harm has reduced stigma over time.

Influence of external factors

Some people noted the negative influence of substances, such as alcohol. These reduced their motivation to use support tools, made it harder to resist gambling, and sometimes caused them to gamble more than intended or bypass their strategies. This effect was stronger when they drank during social events where they already felt pressure to gamble.

Conversely, others said they do not drink much or that alcohol does not affect their gambling, particularly those from ethnic and religious minorities. However, this was not seen as a route to remove the impact of all social factors on their gambling.

As mentioned above, large sporting events like the Cheltenham Festival also reduced engagement with tools and strategies. People found it difficult to avoid these events and the related conversations about gambling. These events could also have a cascading effect, prompting more betting on other sports. When multiple large events occurred close together, even strategies like budgeting became difficult to maintain.

Key Reflections

People's social environments have a considerable impact on their engagement with tools and strategies due to stigma, social pressure to gamble, and the link between socialising and gambling. People reflected their concerns around how friends and family would react to any requests for support or help. Alongside destigmatising campaigns, it is key to **equip people to have conversations around gambling with their friends and family.** Similarly, developing resources to support friends and family to positively support those seeking self-directed support is also crucial.

Further, helping people plan for and manage triggers, including the possible negative influence of alcohol and wider peer pressure to gamble, is also important.

Sustained engagement with a SDTS allows for greater understanding of the potential impact or effectiveness of a chosen approach. People reported a range of positive and negative impacts from using SDTS, some of which may relate to whether they picked the correct approach for themselves and their underlying motivation for change.

5) Impact and effectiveness of tools and strategies[31]

Positive impacts of SDTS

Impacts on gambling: People reported successfully reducing their gambling (in terms of spend, time, and frequency) or stopping altogether. They linked these positive impacts to tools and strategies that helped in several ways. The tools allowed them to directly restrict their gambling and make more conscious decisions, for example, when amending a spending limit. They also helped reduce the desire to gamble by increasing their awareness of the realities and harms of gambling, such as financial risks. People became more aware of the risk of relapse and the potential negative consequences of returning to gambling.

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[31]In this research, 'impact' and 'effectiveness' are based on self-reported data. Consequently, these findings represent the participants' subjective perceptions of change rather than objective clinical or behavioral measurements

Impacts on personal wellbeing: Some people reported greater life quality, improved physical and mental health, and greater financial freedom. They also felt a new sense of control and reassurance around their gambling, alongside increased happiness and peacefulness**.**

For some who continued gambling after using the tools, they found they enjoyed it more as it aligned with how they wanted to engage in the activity and reflected better boundaries. They had more time for other activities, felt more present in their lives, and took pride in their progress. They also drew comfort from knowing they were not alone. Finally, some people noted spillover benefits, such as cutting down on alcohol and exercising more.

Impacts on interpersonal relationships: People reported that their connections with family, friends, partners improved, and they spent more meaningful time with them. Others, especially partners, showed increased trust in them, and they felt more open to discussing gambling with people in their lives. In addition, they developed new ways of socialising that did not involve gambling, such as inviting friends and family to do other activities together.

More than 80% of people who used each tool said it was 'effective or totally effective' at helping them manage or reduce their gambling.[32]

Table 20: Perceived effectiveness of tools.

% who said these tools would be…	Time, deposit or spend limits	Self-exclusion tools	Blocking tools	Apps with therapeutic content	Educational resources	Helplines
	n = 936	n = 544	n = 706	n = 734	n = 650	n = 410
…totally ineffective in managing or reducing gambling	3%	6%	6%	6%	6%	9%
…ineffective in managing or reducing gambling	9%	12%	11%	14%	13%	13%
…effective in managing or reducing gambling	54%	49%	52%	51%	53%	49%
…totally effective in managing or reducing gambling	33%	33%	30%	27%	27%	28%
…don't know	1%	1%	<1%	2%	2%	1%

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[32] Due to methodological limitations, we are unable to identify whether this varies by PGSI risk level, and whether perceived effectiveness aligns with sustained behavioural change

Note that some columns might not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Negative impacts after starting to use SDTS

Some people reported a range of negative impacts once they started to use SDTS, especially as they adjusted to reduced gambling in their lives.

The data in this section came from the qualitative interviews and diary studies and therefore reflects the experiences of a small sample of individuals. We feel it's important to present these findings to help demonstrate a balanced view of experiences, however we would caution on generalising the following, as they come from a small subset of the sample.

Impacts on gambling: Some people reported no impact on their gambling behaviour or their urge to gamble from the use of tools or strategies. Others reported unintended consequences or compensatory behaviour. They found that restrictions on one type of gambling, e.g. self-exclusion from local betting shops or using limits online, led them to:

- use new gambling products they might not have used otherwise.
- gamble more than they normally would; or
- stretch out gambling sessions by playing games with smaller stakes.

People attributed these behaviours to cutting down on gambling too quickly e.g. when self-excluding from certain products, rather than cutting down gradually. They found this approach was unmanageable and led to more gambling overall. They noted that these kinds of setbacks or relapses can be demoralising.

Impacts on personal wellbeing: People reported negative emotional impacts such as feelings of being snappy, on-edge or frustrated when starting to use tools and strategies. These feelings were particularly difficult to manage during setbacks, which they linked to the non-linear nature of recovery.

However, people noted that these negative effects became easier to manage over time, as they became familiar with their new routines. Some also stated they would tolerate these feelings in view of the positive changes to their gambling behaviour.

Impacts on interpersonal relationships: People reported negative impacts on their interpersonal relationships after they reduced or stopped their gambling after using SDTS. These included:

- losing personal relationships and feeling left out of social activities.
- finding it hard to explain their changing behaviour or discuss gambling; and
- experiencing a shift in social identity from being seen as someone who gambles to someone who does not.

This was particularly salient for younger people, for example, if they had to stop meeting friends to avoid gambling.

However, people noted these negative impacts often faded over time, allowing them to eventually rejoin friends without the urge to gamble. Some viewed these social difficulties not as a negative impact, but as a sign of poor-quality relationships. In contrast, others felt no social impacts, either because they did not discuss their gambling with others or felt no social pressure to do so.

Key Reflections

Our findings show that cutting down too quickly can be counterproductive, leading to unintended consequences like switching to new products or gambling more. For example, some individuals who self-excluded from local betting shops reported "stretching out" their gambling sessions by playing games with smaller stakes online. This substitution effect is a result of the underlying psychological factors influencing risky gambling not being addressed. When a primary coping mechanism is removed but not replaced, it can create a vacuum - which is then filled by other reward-seeking behaviours.[33]

Tools should therefore emphasise gradual, manageable reduction plans over a 'cold turkey' approach. This follows a logic similar to the tapering strategies found in other addiction sectors, such as alcohol or opioid recovery, providing a useful conceptual- though not clinical-model for supporting those who find sudden or complete stopping unmanageable[34, 35]

Similarly, ensuring people understand that recovery is a non-linear process is key. Tools must frame setbacks and negative feelings as a **normal part of the journey, not a failure**, and that shifts in motivation and emotional challenges are to be expected.

A significant challenge in this process is the shift in social identity; younger users, in particular, noted feeling isolated or "left out" when they had to stop meeting friends to avoid gambling triggers. Incorporating strategies for emotional

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[33] Kim, H. S., McGrath, D. S., & Hodgins, D. C. (2023). Addiction substitution and concurrent recovery in gambling disorder: Who substitutes and why?. Journal of Behavioral Addictions, 12(3), 682–696. https://doi.org/10.1556/2006.2023.00046

[34] Kral LA, Jackson K, Uritsky T. A practical guide to tapering opioids. Ment Health Clin [Internet]. 2015;5(3):102-8. DOI: 10.9740/mhc.2015.05.102

[35] University Hospitals Sussex NHS Foundation Trust. (2023, October). How to safely reduce your alcohol intake. https://www.uhsussex.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/How-to-reduce-alcohol-intake.pdf

regulation and resilience is crucial to help people push through difficult periods and avoid becoming demoralised.

Next steps

The subsequent phase of this project was focused on generating recommendations and ideas to inform the work and offering of gambling support organisations, including GambleAware. We aimed to focus our solution exploration on the most important challenges and barriers identified in our Explore phase.

The LEAP was key in helping us determine this focus. We conducted an online workshop with members of the panel to gather their input on:

> (1) the findings and insights collected so far and identified challenges, and

> (2) where to narrow our attention for solution development.

We shared a written summary of our Explore findings with the panel ahead of the workshop. During the workshop, we presented the key challenges emerging from our qualitative research, followed by a series of activities to identify our areas of focus for the co-design and recommendations phase.

Our subsequent co-design phase used the lessons learnt on different tools and strategies from this Explore phase, and built on these through a mix of (1) desk work by the research team; (2) developing low fidelity prototypes of the intervention ideas; (3) two workshops with people from our target populations to refine these prototypes; and (4) collating feedback from relevant organisations on feasibility of implementing these ideas.

Details on the later stages of this project can be found in our final synthesis report.

Appendix A

Target population, sample size, and recruitment

Reflexive interviews

We recruited 30 individuals who wished or previously wished to spend less time or money on gambling or reduce their gambling in some other way. The full sampling criteria is presented in Table A1 below.

Our final sampling matrix is below

Table A1:Reflexive Interview sampling criteria. Note that some sampling criteria were not reported by all participants, therefore, the numbers might not add up to 30.

Reflexive interviews sampling matrix		
Primary sampling criteria		**N (Time point 1)**
Point in journey in use of self- directed tools (all participants)	Tool or strategy user	26
	Non tool or strategy user	4
Secondary sampling criteria (all participants)		
Experiences with marginalisation	Women	8
	Ethnic minorities	9
	Religious minorities	4
	Young people (18 - 30 years)	5
	Older people (60+ years)	3
	Identified mental health conditions	2
Disability	Disabled (as defined by the Equality Act)	5
Digitally excluded	Digital excluded tool/ strategy users [using Ofcom measure]	3
Educational attainment (all participants)	Secondary school up to 16 years	9
	Higher or secondary or further education (A-levels, BTEC, etc.)	5
	College or university	11
	Post-graduate degree	4

Household Income (proxy for risk of Financial Vulnerability[36])	Household income £25,0000 - <£35,000[37]	22
	Household income < £25,000	3
Employment status	Employed or Self-Employed	21
	Economically inactive: unemployed, retired, student, looking after home or family, long-term sick or disabled, or other	4
Geographic region	London	6
	North of England	4
	Midlands	4
	South East & East of England	1
	Wales & South West	1
	Scotland	3

We recruited participants through two channels:

- **Specialist recruitment agency:** We worked with the recruitment agency Criteria to recruit the majority of research participants.

- **Lived experience networks:** Building on both BIT's and Bournemouth University's contacts, we worked with partners at organisations like GamCare and BetKnowMore to help recruit our sample. These organisations had established Lived Experience networks with strong safeguarding measures in place that we were able to leverage. Their members also represented a range of different communities.

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[36] Household income is not a direct measure of financial vulnerability (which has many other factors contributing to it, including level of debt, savings, etc.). Since this is not a primary criteria, we can use household income as a proxy measure for the risk of experiencing financial vulnerability.

[37] Median household income in the financial year ending 2020 was £32,300 from ONS (2021) Data and analysis from Census 2021

All recruits received reminders to mitigate against cancellations. We accounted for a level of attrition between Waves and accounted for it within our sample design. We also offered electronic vouchers worth £50 for Time point 1 interviews and £60 for Time point 2 interviews, in return for interviews lasting up to an hour at both waves.

Diary study

Those recruited for the reflexive interviews were asked whether they were interested in participating in the diary study as well. We contacted those who expressed their interest, of which 8 chose to participate. This subset consisted of those who were actively using SDTS.

Given the relatively small sample size, we did not set an overly prescriptive or detailed sampling criteria, but we aimed to achieve a spread of participants in relation to:

- How long they have been using the tools: newer and more established users

- Frequency of use: habitual and fluctuating use

- Types of tools and strategies used

- Key demographics

As with the interviews, to reduce attrition and encourage full diary completion, we offered £15 per full week of diary completion, including in-situ responses. Those completing all four weeks received an additional £10 incentive.

Qualitative analytical approach

Interview recordings and diary study responses were analysed using a Framework approach, which allowed for themes to be identified in a transparent and structured way. This process involved creating an analytical framework to categorise participants and analyse their characteristics, their attitudes and experience using SDTS. The qualitative data was summarised in the appropriate cell. Thematic analysis was then undertaken to identify the range of concepts and themes from across the sample and between different subgroups or personas (segments of the sample) where there was evidence available. These were analysed to understand how each participant's characteristics, views and experiences interrelated. However, given the small sample size, subgroup analysis was limited.

Quantitative research

Survey weighting

To do this, we applied a "raking" algorithm, which adjusted weights for gender and ethnicity. These calibrated weights were then used in all descriptive analyses. For subgroup analyses (by gender and ethnicity), we conducted logistic regressions, including the following covariates: age, above median income, degree dummy (capturing whether someone had a degree or not), employment status, location, PGSI category. Only the unweighted means were used in the subgroup analysis.

Table A2: Gender and ethnicity distribution in the survey data and the weights used to represent the general population among those who gamble

Gender	Original data	Weighted data
Women	50%	42%
Men	50%	58%
Ethnicity	**Original data**	**Weighted data**
Ethnic minoritised groups	37%	18%
White British	63%	82%

Survey design

Gambling Behaviour

Which of the following activities do you tend to do, and how often? (Response scale applies to all activities below)

Activity	Frequency options (Select one)
National Lottery draws or scratch cards - from retailer or online	Everyday or most days / At least once a week / 2-3 times a month / Once a month / Every few months / Once a year / Have done in the past but not in the last 12 months / Never do this
Online slots / instant win	(Same frequency options)
Fruit or slot machines - in a venue e.g. pub, arcade	(Same frequency options)
Virtual gaming machine in a betting shop	(Same frequency options)

Bingo - online or in a bingo hall	(Same frequency options)
Horse or dog racing - online or in a betting shop	(Same frequency options)
Sports betting - online or in a betting shop	(Same frequency options)
Betting on other events e.g. political events - online or in a betting shop	(Same frequency options)
Casino games (e.g. poker, blackjack, roulette) - online or at a casino	(Same frequency options)
Another form of gambling	(Same frequency options)

Thoughts about changing gambling behaviour

In the past 12 months, have you wanted or tried to reduce either the amount of money or time you spend gambling?

- Yes / No

Which aspect(s) of your gambling have you thought about reducing? Please select all that apply.

- Spend less money gambling
- Spend less time gambling
- Stop certain types of gambling (e.g. lottery or casino games)
- Stop gambling for a period of time (temporarily)
- Stop gambling forever
- Other (please say which)

Tools: Use (Overall)

Which of the following gambling management tools have you used in the past 12 months? Please select all that apply.

- Time, deposit or spend limits. These are tools which let people set limits on the time and money they spend gambling.
- Self-exclusion tools, such as GamStop or from the operator directly. These tools allow people to exclude themselves from gambling for a set period.
- Mobile apps or websites blocking access to gambling websites, or gambling transactions from your bank account.
- Mobile apps providing information on self-management techniques or therapeutic content. This could include apps with mindfulness or peer support features (e.g., "buddy" apps).
- Online resources and educational tools. This could include personalised feedback on gambling activity, CBT workbooks and video / YouTube tutorials.
- Helplines and online support (e.g. Gamblers anonymous / other peer support groups).
- I haven't used any tools in the past 12 months.

Tools: Use Frequency

How often do you use time, deposit or spend limits?

How often do you use self-exclusion tools?

How often do you use mobile apps or websites that block access to gambling websites, or gambling transactions from your bank account?

How often do you use mobile apps that provide information on self-management techniques or therapeutic content?

How often do you use online resources and educational tools?

How often do you use helplines and online support?

(Response options for all frequency questions)

- Everyday or most days / At least once a week / 2-3 times a month / Once a month / Every few months / Once a year

Tools: Breakdown by Tool Categories

You said that you use time, deposit or spend limits. Which ones do you typically use?

Please select all that apply.

- Deposit limits
- Loss limits
- Session time limits
- Reality check tools
- Other (please say which)

You said that you use self-exclusion tools. Which types of gambling venues or platforms do you typically self-exclude from? Please select all that apply.

- Adult gaming centres, high street arcades, motorway service areas and family entertainment
- Land-based bingo premises
- Online gambling websites
- Physical betting shops
- Land-based casinos
- Individual gambling operators
- Other (please say which)

You said you often use apps or websites that block gambling or stop gambling payments. Which ones do you typically use? Please select all that apply.

- Mobile apps or websites that stop you from visiting gambling websites
- Mobile apps or websites that block gambling payments from your bank account
- Other (please say which)

You said that you use mobile apps that offer advice or support to help you manage your gambling. Which of these do you typically use? Please select all that apply.

- Mobile apps that ask about your gambling and give feedback about your behaviour and risk level
- Mobile apps that use CBT (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy) or ask helpful questions to help you think about your thoughts, feelings or reactions and support behaviour change
- Other (please say which)

You said you often use online resources and learning tools. Which ones do you use? Please select all that apply.

- Online courses. These might cover things like gambling addiction, how to manage risk, or ways to recover
- Downloadable guides. For example, how to deal with triggers, manage debt,

make a budget, or care for your mental health
- Educational programs
- CBT (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy) workbooks made to help manage gambling
- Apps or quizzes that copy gambling choices and give you feedback about your risk
- Guides or interactive tools for young people. These might explain gambling risks, how to spot a problem, and where to get help
- Tools to help adults talk to young people about gambling
- YouTube videos or online forums like GamCare or Reddit
- Other (please say which)

You said you use helplines or online support. Which ones do you use? Please select all that apply.

- Services offering free online support via live chat, forums, and self-help tools (e.g. Gambling Therapy)
- Online groups or meetings where people talk, share experiences, and support each other (e.g. Gamblers Anonymous)
- Helplines that give advice and support for anyone affected by gambling (e.g. National Gambling Helpline)
- Other (please say which)

Tools: Motivations (Why you use them)

You said you use time, deposit, or spending limits. What are your main reasons for using these tools? Please select all that apply.

- I noticed signs that gambling was causing me harm (e.g. chasing losses, worrying about money or time, feeling ashamed or stressed)
- Something happened that made me realise I needed limits (e.g. losing a lot of money or gambling too much during a special event)
- I wanted to spend less time or money on gambling to stay in control or reach personal goals (e.g. saving money, feeling better, using my time differently)
- Talking to friends or family made me reflect on my gambling
- I saw how gambling harmed someone I know and wanted to avoid the same outcome
- Limits are easy to find, set up, and use
- I often get reminders or messages from gambling websites or apps to set limits
- Something else (please tell us what)

You said you use self-exclusion tools. What are your main reasons for using these? Please select all that apply.

- I noticed signs of harm in myself (e.g. chasing losses, worrying about money or time spent gambling, feeling ashamed, stressed, or mentally tired)
- Something happened that made me decide to take a break from gambling (e.g. losing a lot of money or gambling too much at a special event)
- I wanted to spend less time or money on gambling to stay in control or reach personal goals (e.g. saving money, feeling better, using my time differently)
- Talking to friends or family made me reflect on my gambling
- I saw someone I know get harmed by gambling and wanted to avoid the same thing
- Self-exclusion tools are easy to find, set up, and use
- I often get reminders or messages from gambling websites or apps to exclude myself
- Something else (please tell us what)

You said you use mobile apps or websites that block gambling sites or stop gambling payments. What are your main reasons for using these? Please select all that apply.

- I noticed signs of harm in myself (e.g. chasing losses, worrying about money or time spent gambling, feeling ashamed, stressed, or mentally tired)
- Something happened that made me decide to take a break from gambling (e.g. losing a lot of money or gambling too much at a special event)
- I wanted to spend less time or money on gambling to stay in control or reach personal goals (e.g. saving money, feeling better, using my time differently)
- Talking to friends or family made me reflect on my gambling
- I saw someone I know get harmed by gambling and wanted to avoid the same thing
- Blocking tools are easy to find, set up, and use
- I often get reminders or messages from gambling websites or apps to block access
- Something else (please tell us what)

You said you use mobile apps that offer advice or support to help you manage your gambling. What are your main reasons for using these?

- I noticed signs that gambling was harming me (e.g. chasing losses, worrying about money or time, feeling ashamed, stressed, or tired)
- Something happened that made me want to block access to gambling sites or transactions (e.g. losing a lot of money or gambling too much during a special event)
- I wanted to spend less time or money on gambling to stay in control or reach personal goals (e.g. saving money, feeling better, using my time differently)
- Talking to friends or family made me reflect on my gambling

- I saw someone I know get harmed by gambling and wanted to avoid the same thing
- These apps are easy to find, set up, and use
- I mostly gamble online, and using blocking tools helps restrict access across multiple sites or platforms
- I often get reminders or messages from gambling websites or apps to block access
- Something else (please tell us what)

You said you use online resources and learning tools. What are your main reasons for using these?

- I noticed signs that gambling was harming me (e.g. chasing losses, worrying about money or time, feeling ashamed, stressed, or tired)
- Something happened that made me want to better understand my gambling and how to manage it (e.g. losing a lot of money or gambling too much during a special event)
- I wanted to spend less time or money on gambling to stay in control or reach personal goals (e.g. saving money, feeling better, using my time differently)
- Talking to friends or family made me reflect on my gambling
- I saw someone I know get harmed by gambling and wanted to avoid the same thing
- These resources are easy to find and use whenever I need them
- Something else (please tell us what)

You said you use helplines and online support. What are your main reasons for using these?

- I noticed signs that gambling was harming me (e.g. chasing losses, worrying about money or time, feeling ashamed, stressed, or tired)
- Something happened that made me want to better understand my gambling and how to manage it (e.g. losing a lot of money or gambling too much during a special event)
- I wanted to spend less time or money on gambling to stay in control or reach personal goals (e.g. saving money, feeling better, using my time differently)
- Talking to friends or family made me reflect on my gambling
- I saw someone I know get harmed by gambling and wanted to avoid the same thing
- These resources are easy to find and use whenever I need them
- Something else (please tell us what)

Tools: Barriers (Why you do not use them)

You said that you do not use time, deposit, or spending limits. What are your main reasons for *not* using these tools? Please select all that apply.

- I didn't know these tools existed, or how to find and set them up
- I mainly gamble in physical places where these tools are harder to find or use
- I don't have the digital skills to set up these tools online
- I don't think these tools would help me manage or reduce my gambling
- It's easy to bypass these tools or keep gambling elsewhere
- I don't want to be judged for using these tools
- I'm worried about how my data would be used
- Other (please tell us what)

If you'd like, please share any extra details about your reasons below. (Optional question)

- Free text

You said that you do not use self-exclusion tools. What are your main reasons for *not* using these tools? Please select all that apply.

- I didn't know these tools existed, or how to find and set them up
- I mainly gamble in physical places where these tools are harder to find or use
- I don't have the digital skills to set up these tools online
- I don't think these tools would help me manage or reduce my gambling
- It's easy to bypass these tools or keep gambling elsewhere
- I don't want to be judged for using these tools
- I'm worried about how my data would be used
- Other (please tell us what)

If you'd like, please share any extra details about your reasons below. (Optional question)

- Free text

You said you do not use mobile apps or websites that block access to gambling websites, or gambling transactions from your bank account. What are your main reasons for *not* using these tools? Please select all that apply.

- I didn't know these tools existed, or how to find and set them up
- I mainly gamble in physical venues where these tools are harder to access or use
- I don't have the digital skills to set up these tools online
- I don't think these tools would help me manage or reduce my gambling
- It's easy to bypass these tools or continue gambling elsewhere

- I don't want to be judged for using these tools
- I'm worried about how my data would be used
- Other (please tell us what)

If you'd like, please share any additional detail about your reasons below. (Optional question)

- Free text

You said you do not use mobile apps that offer advice or support to help you manage your gambling. What are you main reasons for *not* using these tools? Please select all that apply.

- I didn't know these tools existed, or how to find and set them up
- I mainly gamble in physical venues where these tools are harder to access or use
- I don't have the digital skills to set up these tools online
- I don't think these tools would help me manage or reduce my gambling
- It's easy to bypass these tools or continue gambling elsewhere
- I don't want to be judged for using these tools
- I'm worried about how my data would be used
- Other (please tell us what)

If you'd like, please share any additional detail about your reasons below. (Optional question)

- Free text

You said you do not use online resources and educational tools. What are your main reasons for *not* using these tools? Please select all that apply.

- I didn't know these resources and tools existed, or how to find and set them up
- I find these resources too general or not helpful enough
- I prefer face-to-face support than online support
- I don't think these tools would help me manage or reduce my gambling
- It's easy to get back into gambling
- I didn't want to be seen looking up gambling help
- Other (please tell us what)

If you'd like, please share any additional detail about your reasons below. (Optional question)

- Free text

You said you do not use helplines or online support. What are your main reasons for *not* using these tools? Please select all that apply.

- I didn't know these resources and tools existed, or how to find and set them up
- I find these resources too general or not helpful enough
- I prefer face-to-face support than online support
- I don't think these tools would help me manage or reduce my gambling
- It's easy to get back into gambling
- I didn't want to be seen looking up gambling help or calling a helpline
- Other (please tell us what)

If you'd like, please share any additional detail about your reasons below. (Optional question)

- Free text

Tools: Barriers to Use (No tools used)

You said you have not used any tools in the past 12 months. What are your main reasons for *not* using any tools?

- Free text

What would encourage you to use gambling management tools?

- Free text

Tools: Perceived Effectiveness

Please rate how effective you think these tools are at helping you manage or reduce your gambling. (Select one option for each tool)

Tool	Response options (Select one)
Time, deposit or spend limits	Totally ineffective / Ineffective / Effective / Totally effective / Don't know
Self-exclusion tools	(Same response options)

Mobile apps or websites blocking access to gambling websites, or gambling transactions from your bank account	(Same response options)
Mobile apps with self-help tips (such as self-management techniques) or therapeutic content	(Same response options)
Online resources and educational tools	(Same response options)
Helplines and online support	(Same response options)

Please briefly explain why you rated the tools the way you did.

- Free text

Tools: Ongoing Use (Usage Status and Reasons for Stopping)

You said that you have used time, deposit or spend limits in the last 12 months. Do you still use these tools?

- Yes / No

If No, why did you stop using time, deposit or spend limits? Please select all that apply.

- I found it too easy to ignore them
- I found it too difficult to set up or maintain the limits
- I preferred using other tools or strategies (e.g., self-exclusion)
- I forgot to set the limits or didn't think about it
- I didn't fully understand how they worked
- I was worried about how my data would be used
- I thought I could control my gambling without the limits
- Something else (please tell us what)

If Yes, when and why do you tend to use time, deposit, or spend limits, rather than other tools?

- Free text

You said that you have used self-exclusion tools in the last 12 months. Do you still use self-exclusion tools?

- Yes / No

If No, why did you stop using self-exclusion tools? Please select all that apply.

- I found it too easy to ignore them
- I found them too difficult to set up and/ or maintain
- I preferred using other tools or strategies (e.g., blocking apps)
- I didn't fully understand how they worked
- I was worried about how my data might be used
- The self exclusion period ended and I did not renew it
- I thought I could control my gambling without needing to exclude myself for a period of time
- Something else (please tell us what)

If Yes, when and why do you tend to use self-exclusion, rather than other tools?

- Free text

You said that you have used blocking tools, such as mobile apps blocking gambling transactions. Do you still use such blocking tools?

- Yes / No

If No, why did you stop using blocking tools?

- I found it too easy to ignore them
- I found them too difficult to set up and/ or maintain
- I preferred using other tools or strategies (e.g., self-exclusion)
- I forgot to renew or update the blocking tools
- I didn't fully understand how they worked or what they blocked
- I was worried about how my data or personal information might be used
- I thought I could control my gambling without needing to block access to gambling sites or transactions
- Something else (please tell us what)

If Yes, when and why do you tend to use blocking tools, rather than other tools?

- Free text

You said that you have used mobile apps that offer advice or support to help you

manage your gambling. Do you still use such tools?

- Yes / No

If No, why did you stop using these tools?

- I found it too easy to ignore them
- I found them too difficult to set up and/ or maintain
- I preferred using other tools or strategies (e.g., self-exclusion)
- I forgot to renew or update the apps
- I didn't fully understand how they worked or what advice/ support they provided
- I was worried about how my data or personal information might be used
- I thought I could control my gambling without needing these tools
- Something else (please tell us what)

If Yes, when and why do you tend to use mobile apps that offer advice or support to help you manage your gambling, rather than other tools?

- Free text

You said that you have used online resources and educational tools in the last 12 months. Do you still use online resources and educational tools?

- Yes / No

If No, why did you stop using online resources and educational tools?

- I found it too easy to ignore them
- I found it hard to stay motivated or keep using them over time
- I preferred using other tools or strategies (e.g., self-exclusion)
- I forgot about them or didn't think to use them again
- I didn't fully understand how they could help me
- I thought I could manage my gambling without needing educational resources
- Something else (please tell us what)

If Yes, when and why do you tend to use online resources and educational tools, rather than other tools?

- Free text

You said that you have used helplines or online support in the last 12 months. Do you still use helplines or online support?

- Yes / No

If No, why did you stop using helplines or online support?

- I found it too easy to ignore them
- I found it hard to stay motivated or keep using them over time
- I preferred using other tools or strategies (e.g., self-exclusion)
- I forgot about them or didn't think to use them again
- I didn't fully understand how they could help me
- I thought I could control my gambling without needing helpline or online support
- Something else (please tell us what)

If Yes, when and why do you tend to use helplines or online support, rather than other tools?

- Free text

Strategies: Use (Overall)

If you were to reduce or manage your gambling, which of these strategies would you normally use? Please select all that apply.

- Talking to family or close friends
- Getting trusted individuals (e.g., partner, family) involved in financial matters
- Avoiding triggers, such as avoiding areas with betting shops or deleting gambling emails
- Setting limits or goals, including planning how to handle urges (e.g., calling a friend), and using reminders to not gamble (e.g., post-it notes, mobile alerts)
- Setting a gambling-free time and/or space, (e.g., no gambling after 6pm)
- Mindfulness and relaxation strategies
- Watching videos by people who used to experience gambling harms
- Other (please say which)
- I would not use any

Strategies: Motivations & Barriers

Strategy: Talk to friends & family

You said that you talk to friends and family about your gambling. What are the main reasons for doing this? Please select all that apply.

- They're the only people I can be open and honest with about my gambling and how it has affected me (e.g., lost my savings, developed health

problems, performed poorly at work)
- They talk to me, ask me questions and support me when I'm struggling or things change
- They help me hold me accountable for reducing or managing my gambling
- They help reduce my anxiety or stress
- Something else (please tell us what)

You said that you do not talk to friends and family about your gambling. What are your main reasons for *not* doing this? Please select all that apply.

- I feel ashamed or embarrassed about my gambling
- I don't want to worry or upset them
- I prefer to deal with it on my own
- I don't think they would understand
- I don't think my gambling is serious enough to talk about
- I'm worried about being judged or criticised
- I have tried before and it wasn't helpful
- Something else (please tell us what)

Strategy: Financial involvement

You said that you involve trusted individuals in financial management. What are the main reasons for doing this? Please select all that apply.

- To help me control the amount of money I spend on gambling
- To reduce the risk of gambling impulsively
- To hold me accountable for spending less money on gambling
- Because I've had financial problems due to gambling in the past (e.g. went into debt, lost savings)
- For general financial support, i.e. not related to gambling specifically
- Something else (please tell us what)

You said that you do not involve trusted individuals in financial management. What are the main reasons for *not* doing this? Please select all that apply.

- I prefer to manage my finances independently
- I don't feel comfortable sharing financial information with others
- I don't trust anyone enough to involve them in my finances
- I haven't thought about doing this before
- I don't think it would be helpful
- I've tried it before and it didn't work well
- My finances are already under control
- I don't have someone I can rely on for this
- Something else (please tell us what)

Strategy: Avoid triggers

You said that you identify triggers and make a conscious effort to avoid them. What are the main reasons for doing this? Please select all that apply.

- To reduce the temptation to gamble
- Because I've noticed certain situations or emotions lead me to gamble
- I've learned about the importance of avoiding triggers through support or treatment
- Something else (please tell us what)

You said that you do not identify triggers or make a conscious effort to avoid them. What are the main reasons for *not* doing this? Please select all that apply.

- I haven't thought about doing this before
- I'm not sure what my triggers are
- I don't know how to avoid my triggers
- I don't think avoiding triggers would help me manage or reduce my gambling
- I don't believe my gambling is triggered by specific situations or emotions
- I've tried this before and it didn't work
- Something else (please tell us what)

Strategy: Set limits or goals, or use commitment strategies

You said that you set limits or goals, or use reminders to not gamble. What are the main reasons for doing this? Please select all that apply.

- It helps me feel more structured or disciplined about my gambling
- It gives me a target to work toward or helps me track progress
- It's worked in the past
- Someone I trust or a support service recommended it
- Something else (please tell us what)

You said that you do not set limits or goals, or use reminders to not gamble. What are the main reasons for *not* doing this? Please select all that apply.

- I haven't thought about doing this before
- I don't know how to set effective limits or goals
- I don't think it would help
- I prefer to be flexible rather than set rules
- I've tried it before and it didn't work for me
- I find it hard to stick to my limits, goals, or plans - even with reminders
- Something else (please tell us what)

Strategy: Gambling-free time and/ or space

You mentioned that you set aside gambling-free times or places. What are the main reasons for doing this? Please select all that apply.

- To help create structure and routine in my day
- To reduce temptation or opportunities to gamble
- It gives me clearer boundaries around my gambling
- To protect time for other activities (e.g. family, work, rest)
- I find it easier to manage my gambling when I limit it to specific times or places
- Something else (please tell us what)

You said that you do not set aside gambling-free times or places. What are the main reasons for *not* doing this? Please select all that apply.

- I hadn't thought about doing this before
- I'm not sure how to set up gambling-free times or spaces that I can stick to
- I don't think this strategy would help me
- I've tried it before and it didn't work
- It's hard for me to keep to gambling-free times or spaces
- Something else (please tell us what)

Strategy: Mindfulness & relaxation strategies

You said that you use mindfulness and relaxation strategies. What are the main reasons for using these? Please select all that apply.

- They help me manage my stress and anxiety
- To improve my overall wellbeing and mental health
- I've learned these techniques through therapy, apps, or support services
- They're easy to use when I need them
- Something else (please tell us what)

You said that you do not use mindfulness and relaxation strategies. What are the main reasons for *not* using these? Please select all that apply.

- I am not familiar with mindful or relaxation techniques
- I don't think they would help me
- I've tried them before and didn't find them useful
- I find them hard to stick with or remember to use
- Something else (please tell us what)

Strategy: Watching videos by people with experience of gambling harm

You said that you watch videos by people who've experienced gambling harm. What are the main reasons for doing this? Please select all that apply.

- I find it motivating to hear how others have overcome similar struggles
- It helps me feel less alone in my experience
- I learn practical tips and strategies from people who've been through it
- It helps me understand the impact of gambling on myself or others
- It reminds me why I want to reduce or manage my gambling
- I find real-life stories more relatable than professional advice
- It helps me reflect on my own gambling behaviours
- Something else (please tell us what)

You said that you do not watch videos by people who've experienced gambling harm. What are the main reasons for *not* using these? Please select all that apply.

- I'm not sure where to find videos like this
- I don't think they would be helpful for me
- I find them uncomfortable or upsetting to watch
- I've tried watching them before but didn't find them useful
- Something else (please tell us what)

Strategies: No strategies

You said you would not use any strategies to help you reduce or manage your gambling. What are your main reasons for *not* using any strategies?

- Free text

What would encourage you to use different strategies to help you reduce or manage your gambling?

- Free text

Strategies: Effectiveness & Situational Helpfulness

If you wanted to reduce or manage your gambling, how likely would you be to talk to your friends and family?

- Very unlikely/ Unlikely/ Likely/ Very likely/ Not sure

In what situations do you think it could be helpful to talk to your friends and family about gambling? Please select all that apply.

- When I feel tempted to gamble
- After I have experienced financial harm from gambling (e.g., got into debt,

lost my savings)
- When I feel overwhelmed or stressed about money
- Something else (please tell us what)
- I don't think it is helpful in any situation

If you wanted to reduce or manage your gambling, how likely would you be to involve trusted individuals in financial management?

- Very unlikely/ Unlikely/ Likely/ Very likely/ Not sure

In what situations do you think it could be helpful to involve trusted individuals in financial management? Please select all that apply.

- When I feel tempted to gamble
- After I have experienced financial harm from gambling (e.g., got into debt, lost my savings)
- When I need help creating or sticking to a budget
- When I feel overwhelmed or stressed about money
- When I receive income or benefits that I want to safeguard
- When I want help monitoring my spending or bank activity
- Something else (please tell us what)
- I don't think it is helpful in any situation

If you wanted to reduce or manage your gambling, how likely would you be to identify triggers and make a conscious effort to avoid them?

- Very unlikely/ Unlikely/ Likely/ Very likely/ Not sure

In what situations do you think it could be helpful to identify triggers and make a conscious effort to avoid them? Please select all that apply.

- When I'm feeling stressed, anxious or overwhelmed
- After I've experienced harm from gambling (e.g., got into debt, lost my savings, developed physical or mental health problems or performed poorly at work)
- When I'm bored or looking for something to do
- When I've been paid or have access to money
- When I'm alone for long periods of time
- When I'm around other people who gamble
- When I experience strong emotions (e.g., anger, sadness, excitement)
- I don't find it helpful to avoid triggers
- Something else (please tell us what)

If you wanted to reduce or manage your gambling, how likely would you be to set

limits or goals, or use reminders to not gamble?

- Very unlikely/ Unlikely/ Likely/ Very likely/ Not sure

In what situations do you think it could be helpful to set limits or goals, or use reminders to not gamble? Please select all that apply.

- When I feel like my gambling is becoming harder to control
- When I know I'll be alone or bored
- After I've experienced harm from gambling (e.g., got into debt, lost my savings, developed physical or mental health problems or performed poorly at work)
- When I've just been paid or have access to money
- When I'm feeling stressed or anxious
- When I know I'll be exposed to gambling (e.g. ads, apps, people gambling)
- As part of my daily routine
- When I'm starting a new week or month (e.g., as part of budgeting or planning)
- Something else (please tell us what)
- I don't find it helpful in any situation

If you wanted to cut back or manage your gambling, how likely would you be to set aside certain times or places where you don't gamble?

- Very unlikely/ Unlikely/ Likely/ Very likely/ Not sure

In what situations do you think it could be helpful to set aside gambling-free times or places? Please select all that apply.

- When I feel a strong urge to gamble
- When I know I'll be alone or bored
- When I'm feeling stressed, anxious, or emotional
- When I've just been paid or have access to money
- When I know I'll be exposed to gambling (e.g. ads, apps, people gambling)
- As part of my daily routine
- Something else (please tell us what)
- I don't find it helpful in any situation

If you wanted to reduce or manage your gambling, how likely would you be to use mindfulness and relaxation strategies?

- Very unlikely/ Unlikely/ Likely/ Very likely/ Not sure

In what situations do you think it could be helpful to use mindfulness and relaxation

strategies? Please select all that apply.

- When I feel stressed, anxious, or overwhelmed
- As part of a regular routine to support my wellbeing
- Before or after situations that usually trigger gambling
- When I'm struggling with sleep, focus, or emotions
- Something else (please tell us what)
- I don't find it helpful to use mindfulness and relaxation strategies

If you wanted to reduce or manage your gambling, how likely would you be to watch videos by people who've experienced gambling harm?

- Very unlikely/ Unlikely/ Likely/ Very likely/ Not sure

In what situations do you think it could be helpful to watch videos by people who've experienced gambling harm? Please select all that apply.

- When I feel like I'm losing motivation to reduce or manage my gambling
- When I've had a setback or gambling slip
- When I need encouragement
- When I'm feeling alone or misunderstood
- As part of a regular routine
- Something else (please tell us what)
- I don't find it helpful to watch videos by people who've experienced gambling harm

Awareness & Information Seeking

Which of the following best describes how you would go about finding tools and strategies to help manage or reduce your gambling? Please select all that apply.

- I would search online (e.g., Google, Reddit, forums)
- I would ask friends, family, or peers for recommendations
- I would speak to a professional (e.g., therapist, GP)
- I would explore tools or strategies mentioned in ads or app signposts
- I would try a few different tools and strategies to see what works
- I would not look for more information; I'd rely on past tools and strategies I've used in other areas of life
- Other (please say which)

If you wanted to find out more about tools or strategies to manage or reduce your gambling, which of the following sources would you trust the most to provide accurate and helpful information? Please select all that apply.

- Government and regulatory bodies
- Gambling operators
- Gambling support organisations (e.g., Gamblers Anonymous, GambleAware)
- Health professionals (e.g., GP, therapist, counselor)
- Financial advisors or money advice services
- Social media or online forums
- Google searches
- Family or friends
- Other (please say which)

Who do you usually go to for support when managing your gambling? Please select all that apply.

- Government and regulatory bodies
- Gambling operators
- Gambling support organisations (e.g., Gamblers Anonymous, GambleAware)
- Health professionals (e.g., GP, therapist, counselor)
- Financial advisors or money advice services
- Social media or online forums
- Google searches
- Family or friends
- Other (please say who)

Why do you go to these people or organisations for support? Please select all that apply.

- They were easy to contact
- I trust them or feel comfortable talking to them
- They have expertise or experience in gambling-related issues
- Someone recommended them to me (e.g. a doctor or online forum)
- I needed specific help (e.g. financial management)
- I felt desperate or needed urgent help
- Something else (please tell us what)

Looking Ahead

What would encourage you to use gambling management tools more?

- Free text

What new tools/strategies (if any) would you find helpful?

- Free text

Is there anything else you'd like to share about your experience with trying to manage your gambling?

- Free text

Additional Questions - PGSI (Problem Gambling Severity Index)

Finally, we just have a few questions about your gambling and lifestyle, for data analysis purposes only. Please remember your answers will always be treated anonymously.

Thinking about the last 12 months... (Response scale applies to all questions below)

Question	Response Options (Select one)
Has your gambling caused any financial problems for you or your household?	Never / Sometimes / Most of the time / Almost always
Have you bet more than you could really afford to lose?	(Same response options)
Have people criticised your betting or told you that you had a gambling problem, regardless of whether or not you thought it was true?	(Same response options)
Have you felt guilty about the way you gamble or what happens when you gamble?	(Same response options)

Appendix B

Database of available tools and strategies

Name of tool/ strategy	Type of tool/strategy	Owned/ ran by	Description of tool/ strategy

BACTA	Self-exclusion	BACTA for high street arcades	Individuals are able to self-exclude from adult gaming centres, high street arcades, motorway service areas and family entertainment centres for 6-12 months by talking to staff at the premises. They will be excluded from all adult gaming centres within one kilometer of the venue.
BetBlocker	Mobile apps	BetBlocker (charity)	A free app that allows users to block access to gambling websites and apps on their or their child's devices. It provides flexible exclusion periods and is compatible with most platforms.
Betknowmore UK	Online resources and educational tools	Betknowmore	Betknowmore UK provides educational support to individuals affected by gambling-related harm through their digital resources and training: E-learning Courses: Covering topics like understanding gambling addiction, risk management, and recovery pathways. Free Educational Guides: Downloadable resources focusing on various aspects of gambling harm, including managing triggers, budgeting, and improving mental health. Peer Support Resources: Educational programs led by people with lived experiences of gambling harm.
BISES (Bingo Industry Self Exclusion Scheme)	Self-exclusion	BISES for bingo clubs	The BISES (Bingo Industry Self-Exclusion Scheme) offers self-exclusion from all licensed land-based bingo premises across Great Britain. You can register either in-person at a licensed bingo premises or by telephoning the premises directly.
Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) Workbooks	Online resources and educational tools	NHS	There are online and printable CBT workbooks specifically designed for managing gambling addiction, which can be used as part of a self-help approach.
Deposit limits	Safer gambling tools on betting sites	Betting operators	Deposit limits allow users to set a maximum amount of money they can deposit into their gambling account over a set period (e.g., daily, weekly, or monthly). If users want to increase the limit, they often face a cooling-off period to prevent impulsive decisions.
GamBan	Mobile apps	GamBan	A paid app that blocks access to gambling sites and apps on mobile and desktop devices. It offers a simple way to prevent access to gambling platforms, and is often bundled with support services.

Gambling payment blocks	Self-exclusion	Banks	Many banks offer the ability to block gambling payments. They do so by blocking individuals' bank accounts or debit cards to stop the account from being used for gambling transactions.
Gambling Therapy	Helplines and online support groups	Gordon Moody	A global service offering free online support via live chat, forums, and self-help tools. It also has a mobile app with resources for gambling addiction.
Gambling Therapy Forum	Helplines and online support groups	Gordon Moody	An international forum where users can share their experiences and access advice from a global community focused on recovery from gambling harm.
GamBlock	Mobile apps	GamBlock	One of the first software products designed to block gambling websites. It offers similar functionality to GamBan and is available for both individuals and businesses.
GamCare Forum	Helplines and online support groups	GamCare	A safe space where those struggling with gambling addiction can connect, share stories, and offer each other support.
GamFam	Online resources and educational tools	GamFam	GamFam is a registered charity in the UK that provides support and resources for individuals and families affected by gambling. The organisation was founded by a family who experienced the harmful effects of gambling firsthand and wanted to use their experience to help others. They offer a structured 5-stage self-help peer support programme called GRA5P.
GAMSTOP	Self-exclusion	GAMSTOP for online gambling	A free national self-exclusion scheme that allows individuals to restrict their access to all GB-licensed online gambling websites. Once registered, individuals cannot access gambling sites for a selected period (6 months, 1 year, or 5 years).
Loss limits	Safer gambling tools on betting sites	Betting operators	Loss limits are caps which restrict the total amount a player can lose within a certain timeframe (daily, weekly, or monthly). Once the limit is reached, the user cannot continue gambling until the next period begins.
MindEd gambling education hub	Online resources and educational tools	NHS	MindEd offers mental health education resources for professionals and the public. Their gambling section includes: Learning Modules: Focused on understanding gambling addiction, its psychological impacts, and strategies for supporting those affected. Resources for Educators and Parents: Guides on

			talking to children and young adults about gambling risks.
MoneyHelper gambling support	Online resources and educational tools	Money and Pensions Service	This government-backed financial advice service provides education on managing finances for those affected by gambling harm. Key resources include: Budgeting Tools: To help individuals regain financial control and prevent further gambling-related debt. Financial Guides: Covering topics like gambling debt management and understanding the financial consequences of gambling.
MOSES (Multi-operator self exclusion scheme)	Self-exclusion	MOSES for physical betting shops	A self-exclusion service for physical betting shops in the UK. Individuals can choose to exclude themselves from gambling at any betting shops in their area.
National Gambling Helpline	Helplines and online support groups	GamCare	Operated by GamCare, this free and confidential helpline (available via phone or live chat) offers advice and support to those affected by gambling, including self-help resources and signposting to professional treatment.
Reality checks	Safer gambling tools on betting sites	Betting operators	Reality checks on gambling apps are notifications that remind users of their time and spending habits while gambling. These alerts typically pop up at set intervals and can inform users about how long they've been playing or how much time is left before a break. The goal is to encourage self-reflection and help users stay aware of their gambling behavior.
Self-exclusion options via gambling operators	Self-exclusion	Gambling operators	Most licensed gambling operators offer self-exclusion tools where users can block themselves from using the platform for a set period of time.
Self-Guided resources	Online resources and educational tools	GamCare	GamCare provides a range of self-help tools, including a self-assessment tool and workbooks designed to help individuals understand and control their gambling habits.
SENSE (Self Enrolment National Self Exclusion)	Self-exclusion	Gambling Commission for casinos	The national self-exclusion scheme for the British casino industry. It enables anyone who is experiencing gambling problems to voluntarily exclude themselves from all licensed, land-based casinos in Great Britain by means of one easy application.

Session time limits	Safer gambling tools on betting sites	Betting operators	Session time limits allow users to set a maximum duration for their gambling sessions. Once the set time limit is reached, the app will notify the user and automatically log them out or prevent further betting until they choose to start a new session. This feature encourages players to take regular breaks.
Spend calculator	Financial tools	GambleAware	Gamble aware's spend calculator is a tool which gives users a better understanding of the time and money they are spending on gambling.
The BigDeal	Online resources and educational tools	GamCare	BigDeal is a youth-focused education hub by GamCare, offering tailored advice for young people, parents, and teachers: Educational Resources for Young People: Guides and interactive tools that explain the risks of gambling, how to recognize problem behaviour, and where to find help. Teacher and Parent Guides: Resources to help parents and teachers talk to young people about gambling and guide them towards healthier behaviours.
Time-outs	Safer gambling tools on betting sites	Betting operators	Time-outs allow users to take a temporary break from gambling activities for a predetermined period, typically ranging from 24 hours to several weeks. During this time, users are unable to access their accounts or place any bets, helping them to regain control over their gambling habits.
YGAM (Young gamers & gamblers education trust)	Online resources and educational tools	YGAM	YGAM focuses on educating young people and professionals who work with them about gambling and gaming-related harms. They provide: Education Hub: A wide range of free educational materials for young people, teachers, and parents to understand the risks of gambling. Parent Hub: Resources to help parents educate their children about gambling risks. Student Hub: Specifically aimed at university students, providing guidance on how to manage gambling behaviours and avoid gambling harm. Workshops and Training: Free training programs for professionals who work with young people to help them recognize and prevent gambling-related issues
Adfam	Helplines and online support groups	Adfam	Adfam is a national charity working with families affected by drugs and alcohol. Adfam operates an online message board and local support groups.

Drinkline	Helplines and online support groups	DrinkAware	Drinkline is a national alcohol helpline in the UK, offering free and confidential support for people concerned about their own or someone else's drinking. It provides advice, information, and referrals to additional support services if needed.
Drugs Meter	Personal monitoring and tracking tools	Global drug survey	Drugs Meter is an anonymous, online tool that allows users to evaluate their drug use by comparing it with global averages. It provides personalised feedback based on users' self-reported consumption patterns. Drugs Meter aims to help individuals better understand the risks associated with their drug use and promote harm reduction by offering scientifically-based advice.
Limit ads about sensitive topics	Self-exclusion	Online platforms	Some websites and apps allow individuals to block ads related to specific topics, such as alcohol or gambling. On many social media platforms, users can often adjust their ad preferences to avoid seeing content related to these themes. Additionally, services like Uber Eats offer the option to restrict certain items, such as alcohol, from appearing in search results or menus.
MoneyHelper	Financial tools	Money and Pensions Service	The MoneyHelper website provides guidance and tools for managing personal finances in the UK. It covers topics like budgeting and saving. The website offers advice on making a budget, managing money using savings pots, choosing the right bank account, and using the "jam jar" method for budgeting.
MyDrinkAware	Personal monitoring and tracking tools	DrinkAware	A free tool to help people track and manage their alcohol consumption. Through its app and online dashboard, users can log their drinks, set personal goals, and receive personalised feedback on their drinking habits. It also provides tips on how to reduce alcohol intake, offering support for people looking to cut down or better understand their relationship with alcohol
Nacoa (The National Association for Children of Alcoholics)	Helplines and online support groups	Nacoa	Nacoa provides a free, confidential telephone and email helpline for children of alcohol-dependent parents and others concerned about their welfare.
SMART recovery (Self-Management and Recovery Training)	Helplines and online support groups	SMART recovery	SMART Recovery groups help people decide whether they have a problem, build up their motivation to change, and offer a set of proven tools and techniques to support recovery.

Snoop	Financial tools	Snoop	Snoop, is another non-gambling specific money management app that helps users track their spending and set budgets for activities such as gambling. It connects to bank accounts, provides personalised spend analysis as well as other features to help users manage their finances.
Talk to Frank	Online resources and educational tools	The Department of Health and Home Office	A UK-based government-run service providing free, confidential advice and information about drugs. It aims to educate people about the risks and effects of drug use, offering support through a 24/7 helpline, website, and live chat. Frank provides straightforward information on different drugs, their effects, and the legal implications, while also offering resources for those seeking help with drug-related issues or looking to support someone with drug problems
We Are With You	Helplines and online support groups	WithYou	We are With You is a UK-wide treatment agency that helps individuals, families and communities manage the effects of drug and alcohol misuse.

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