

Behavioural science-informed messages can help “at risk” gamblers set their own limits

Applying BI to reduce problem gambling

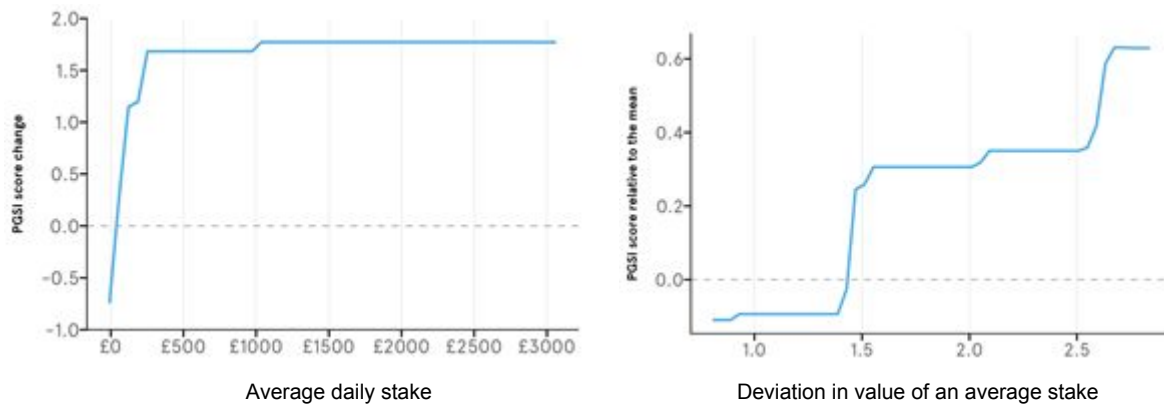
The rise of online gambling means that placing a bet is only ever a few clicks away. This increased accessibility has been a boon for the majority of gamblers who play safely. However, for those that are negatively affected by gambling, increased accessibility poses a risk of financial, social or health-related harm.

As part of the GambleAware remote gambling research programme, we (the Behavioural Insights Team) sought to understand which behavioural influences might be most relevant to risky play online. To do this, we first conducted a **review of the relevant behavioural science literature**, focusing on topics such as gambling trends in the UK, conceptualising and measuring problem gambling, key features of remote gambling that influence behaviour, and the effectiveness of behavioural interventions.

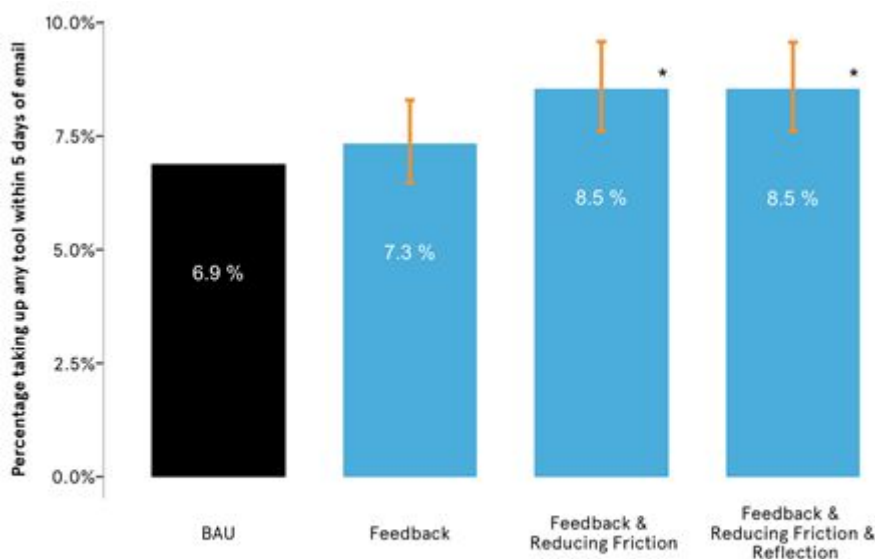
We also completed **semi-structured interviews** with 16 current gamblers, and with two professionals treating gambling disorders, to better understand online gambling from the perspective of a regular gambler. Gamblers told us that the nature of online sites can encourage them to become engrossed in their play, and that money spent online doesn't 'feel real'. These findings were supported by a third strand of our work; a **mystery shopping exercise**, in which our researchers engaged in low stakes gambling, on six operator websites, over a period of two weeks.

Another objective in this project was to understand operators' practices. We **reviewed operator practices** and interviewed several operators, looking at how players interact with gambling sites, and when and how operators may intervene to discourage risky play. We found that many operators use similar approaches to encourage safe play - such as online messaging, text messaging, and telephone calls signposting Responsible Gambling tools. If risky play continues, operators may enforce mandatory limits, remove certain privileges, or suspend a player's account.

We also **analysed data from four operators** to explore whether problem gamblers could be identified by matching Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI) scores to play data. This exercise helped us to understand which behavioural factors are most predictive of having a high PGSI score. Results were intuitive: the higher and more erratic a players' stakes, the more likely they were to have a high PGSI score.



Finally, **we worked with Sky Betting and Gaming and Bet365 to test behavioural science-informed messages** sent to those identified as “at risk”. We aimed to increase the uptake of Responsible Gambling tools by making them easier to access (i.e. reducing “friction”) and by informing the player that their gambling behaviour is riskier than other people’s (i.e. “social norms”). On both websites, we found that **reducing friction increased the number of players setting deposit limits and setting a cool-off period**, compared with ‘business as usual’ messages. The social norms message, however, was not effective.



N = 12711
 ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, + p<0.1
 Primary Analysis

Ultimately, **the project has made strides to better understand behaviours** related to risky play online. There are simple actions operators can take: for example, simply reducing steps to access responsible gambling tools increased take-up. However, there is still a lot to learn. To make real progress in preventing harm, **we need operators to test ambitious and impactful solutions** that protect at-risk gamblers. These solutions need to be rigorously tested and scaled across the industry. This will be the core objective of our second phase of work with Gamble Aware.