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Nature paper reveals gambling harm more prevalent than previously thought

A new **Nature Human Behaviour** [paper](#) based on seven years of anonymised bank data has revealed that gambling harm rates are far higher than previous prevalence studies have indicated.

The landmark study is based on data from 10% of the UK population that was released to researchers by the UK's Lloyds Bank. The study gives a much clearer picture of how pervasive gambling harm is compared to conventional prevalence studies, in which people self-report their gambling activities.

The research has revealed that some people are spending up to one third of their income gambling, a statistic much higher than those coming out of more common prevalence studies.

Alliance for Gambling Reform Chief Advocate, the Rev Tim Costello, said it was fair to assume the UK numbers would be applicable to Australia, and perhaps even higher here.

"The sad reality is that [Australians are the world's biggest gamblers](#), so it is well within the realms of possibility to suggest the impact of gambling harm would be much higher here than these UK figures reveal, and these figures are already bad enough," Rev Costello said.

"I offer high praise to Lloyds Bank for sharing this anonymised data with the researchers to help us all get a better understanding of how big of an issue gambling harm is around the world. I also congratulate the researchers on their dedication, and for being published in such a prestigious journal.

"I hope Australian banks will follow suit and offer their own anonymised data. They have nothing to lose in sharing this data with researchers, and they'd be performing a public service in doing so."

Some of the impacts revealed in the research included:

- A 10% increase in gambling almost doubled the risk of a person missing a mortgage payment
- Higher levels of gambling led to higher risk of future physical disability and/or unemployment
- High levels of gambling are associated with a likelihood of mortality that is about one third higher, for both men and women, regardless of age
- Increased spend on gambling led to reduced spending on education, travel, self-care, fitness and, worryingly, filling prescriptions – all suggesting lower levels of overall physical and possibly mental health.

Rev Costello noted that this research goes against the conventional wisdom that only heavy gamblers experience harm, and shows that even small gambling increases can be demonstrably harmful.

"It really is time our governments woke up to how important a public health issue gambling harm is," Rev Costello said. "Some serious action is needed, and needed now."

Gambling reform advocate Anna Bardsley, who lost ten years of her life to poker machines, said she wasn't surprised that anonymised data revealed much higher levels of gambling harm.

"It's hard enough to admit to yourself that you have an issue with gambling, let alone tell someone else about it, including a researcher," Ms Bardsley said. "Sometimes you may not even be conscious of the fact that you're not being completely truthful about how much you're spending.

"This research is a real game-changer in terms of understanding both the scale and scope of the problem. We've long known the [social costs](#) of gambling harm, but to have these impacts so clearly linked surely is the wake up call governments and policy makers needed.

"Australian banks have the opportunity to save lives by providing this same information to our local researchers. I hope they will do the right thing and offer their data up for such rigorous analysis here, where gambling harm is arguably the worst in the world -- the losses most certainly are."

Interviews are available upon request, including with one of the researchers for this study, who is now based in Australia.

Media contact: Rebecca Thorpe on 0491 209 436 or rebecca.thorpe@agr.org.au
See [here](#) for a gambling language guide for journalists.