



# Gambling, gambling problems and alcohol

Research shows that there is a clear correlation between gambling problems and alcohol consumption. It is therefore important to consider prevention measures from both the problem gambling and alcohol fields and assess whether it would be beneficial to integrate preventative efforts.

Problem gamblers, that is people who have experienced negative consequences as a result of their gambling, are more likely to develop risky alcohol habits than others. The converse is also true, that people with risky drinking habits are more likely to have gambling problems than the general population. Almost eight percent of men who had risky alcohol habits in 2008/2009 were problem gamblers and a further thirteen percent of the group were at-risk gamblers. The corresponding proportion of those who did not have risky drinking habits was two and five percent respectively.

About fifty-five percent of problem gamblers had risky drinking habits compared to approximately sixteen percent of those who were not problem gamblers.

## Alcohol in the gambling environment

Many gambling venues also serve alcohol, for example, permits for Vegas gambling machines require an alcohol licence<sup>1</sup>. Casino Cosmopol, a company run by Svenska Spel which operates Sweden's four international casinos, serves alcohol in their gambling areas and many of the country's racetracks sell alcohol in their restaurants. The main purpose of linking alcohol and gambling permits within gambling venues is supervision, as staff in these venues are already required to supervise customers.

## How common is it to drink alcohol while gambling?

Just over seven per cent of those who had gambled in the past year said that they usually consume alcohol while they are gambling. Of these, close to one in ten were problem gamblers. Drinking alcohol in connection with gambling is more common among men than among women. In regards to problem gambling, one in three male problem gamblers

## Swelogs

Swelogs, the Swedish longitudinal gambling study, is a Swedish population study of health and gambling being conducted over seven years, between 2008 and 2015. The study aims to build an evidence base to develop effective preventive measures against the harmful effects of excessive gambling. The roughly 8,000 randomly selected respondents between the ages of 16 and 84 who took part in the baseline study will be contacted at least three more times during the course of the study. Data used in this fact sheet is from 2008/09, 2009/10 and 2012. The degree of gambling problems was assessed based on the measurement instrument Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI).

Read more at [www.folkhalsomyndigheten.se](http://www.folkhalsomyndigheten.se)

usually consumes alcohol while gambling. The corresponding proportion of female problem gamblers was one in ten. There was no association for women between being a problem gambler and having risky drinking habits.

## Alcohol consumption is common for certain gambling forms

The level of alcohol consumption varies for different forms of gambling. Consumption of alcohol is very common while playing poker at a club (60%), casino gambling at restaurants (73%), gambling machines in pubs<sup>2</sup> (40%) or at Casino Cosmopol (47%), while it is quite unusual at racetracks (13%).

## Drinking alcohol while using gambling machines is associated with problem gambling

Results indicate no correlation between problem gambling and alcohol consumption for gambling on poker at a club<sup>3</sup> or while gambling at racetracks. Drinking while gambling at Casino Cosmopol was associated with a lower probability of being a problem gambler. In contrast, there was a clear correlation between being a problem gambler and consuming alcohol while gambling on gambling machines. The association between drinking and gambling at restaurant casinos was not statistically significant.

*Please turn over*

1. Except for gambling machines in bingo halls  
2. This variable also includes gambling machines at bingo halls where alcohol is not served.  
3. Poker at Casino Cosmopol is included in these analyses in gambling sessions at Casino Cosmopol and not poker at a club

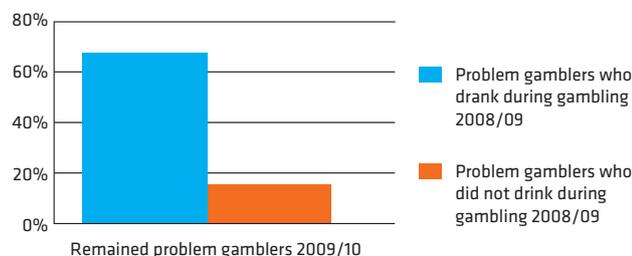
## What are the risks over time between alcohol consumption and problem gambling?

The results regarding the relationship between alcohol and problem gambling indicate that:

- risky drinking habits increase the risk of becoming a problem gambler.
- being a problem gambler increases the risk of developing risky drinking habits.
- risky drinking habits reduce the probability of lowering the level of, or recovering from, gambling problems.

Current alcohol consumption habits play a more significant role in developing problem gambling than alcohol habits from one year earlier. The results also show that risky drinking habits and problem gambling are mutually reinforcing. As gambling problems increase, it is likely that alcohol problems will increase at the same time. When we look at alcohol consumption during gambling overall (not broken down by type of gambling), the risk of becoming a problem gambler increases. The relationship remains even after controlling for risky drinking habits.

Number of problem gamblers 2008/2009 who continued to be problem gamblers in the one year follow up, divided into those who responded that they usually drink alcohol while gambling and those who did not.



Problem gamblers who regularly drink while gambling are more likely to still be a problem gambler one year later, compared to problem gamblers who do not usually drink alcohol when they gamble: 68 percent of problem gamblers who drank while they gambled continued to be problem gamblers, compared to 16 percent of problem gamblers who did not (see chart). The relationship remained even after controlling for risky drinking habits.

## Conclusions

Some of the key findings:

- Alcohol consumption during gambling increases the risk of becoming a problem gambler.
- Alcohol consumption during gambling reduces the likelihood of problem gamblers recovering from their gambling problems.
- Alcohol consumption during gambling is common with certain forms of gambling: gambling machines, restaurant casinos, poker at clubs and gambling at Casino Cosmopol.
- The correlation between alcohol consumption during gambling and problem gambling is particularly clear with gambling machines.
- Risky drinking habits and alcohol consumption during gambling are most common among men. Men are also over-represented among problem gamblers.

Consuming alcohol in connection with gambling seems to influence gambling behaviour. Experimental studies<sup>4</sup> examining alcohol consumption in connection with gambling on gambling machines and roulette have shown that alcohol consumption contributes to people gambling faster and more impulsively, gambling with higher amounts per game and taking more risks. Alcohol seems to influence the gambling behaviour of problem gamblers more than other gamblers<sup>5</sup>.

From the results we can conclude that the service of alcohol in connection with gambling causes increased risks of problem gambling, particularly in relation to gambling machines, which should be taken into account with regards to issuing permits. The results also indicate the need to integrate prevention measures from both the problem gambling and alcohol fields and that it is likely risky drinking habits can be prevented by preventing gambling problems.

Risky drinking habits were measured in this study, as well as in the annual national public health survey conducted by the Public Health Agency of Sweden, by three questions drawn from the AUDIT (Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test) questionnaire.

Read more at [www.folkhalsomyndigheten.se](http://www.folkhalsomyndigheten.se)

4. Experimental studies are conducted in controlled environments (often laboratories) and often with a specific selection from which it is not possible to generalise. Phillips, J. G. and R. P. Ogeil (2007). "Alcohol consumption and computer Blackjack." *The Journal of General Psychology* 134(3): 333–353 and Cronce, J. M. and W. R. Corbin (2010). "Effects of alcohol and initial gambling outcomes on within-session gambling behavior." *Experimental and Clinical Psychopharmacology* 18(2): 145–157.  
5. Ellery, M., S. Stewart, et al. (2005). "Alcohol's effects on video lottery terminal (VLT) play among probably pathological gamblers" *Journal of gambling Studies* 21(3): 299–324.



Folkhälsomyndigheten  
PUBLIC HEALTH AGENCY OF SWEDEN

Solna Nobels väg 18, S-171 82 Solna Östersund Forskarens väg 3, S-831 40 Östersund.  
[www.folkhalsomyndigheten.se](http://www.folkhalsomyndigheten.se)