



Folkhälsomyndigheten
PUBLIC HEALTH AGENCY OF SWEDEN

Gambling and gambling problems in Sweden 2008-2009

Swelogs epidemiological study



Summary

SWELOGS, Swedish Longitudinal Gambling Study, is a research program, conducted and financed by the Swedish National Institute of Public Health. The over arching goal of the project is to develop knowledge and methods that can prevent gambling problems. An epidemiological study and an in-depth study with several measure points are planned in the time-span between 2008–2014. The material for this report origin from the first measurement of the epidemiological study carried out November 2008 – August 2009.

The epidemiological study has ten purposes; including to measure the incidence of gambling problems and gambling addiction in Sweden, and to examine how these co-vary with gambling patterns and social, health and economical situations. The study should also describe the gambling situation in the general public as a whole as well as in different groups and compare these results with the ones from earlier Swedish and international studies.

In order to measure how gambling problems and gambling addiction covariates with other factors response data from interviews and questionnaires have been analyzed with Statistics Sweden's register data regarding education, income etc. The questionnaires contain questions about gambling, gambling problems, health, security, social relations, occupation, economy, living environment, relatives, helpseeking and more. The estimations of gambling problems were made with the measurement instruments Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI) and South Oaks Gambling Screen-Revised (SOGS-R).

The gambling market

The gross amount for gambling with money in Sweden has increased with about 50 percent over the last fifteen years. As a share of the households' disposable income, however, it has remained on three percent. The net turnover has not increased equally since many gambling forms have received permission to increase the refund rate. In 2009 the turnover in net, e.g. the turnover after paid out winnings, was about 16.8 billion Swedish crowns. It has become increasingly difficult to estimate the turnover from the gambling market, mainly due to the increased unregulated gambling.

Gambling with money exists in most of the countries in the world. The development of the European gambling market is somewhat contradictory; an ongoing liberalisation in some countries parallel to the efforts of keeping the monopoly in others. In Sweden, gambling with money and valuables has existed since the Viking Age. As in the rest of Europe, gambling reached a high in intensity and spread during the 16th century, followed by a ban of most gambling forms in the 17th century. During the 19th century more and more games were again legalized.

A notable commercialisation of the Swedish market took place during the 1980's with a number of new gambling forms introduced and large amounts invested in marketing. Today the Swedish gambling market contains a wide spectrum of monetary games. Since the 1960's, the gambling market has cooperated with the national television and as a result of the technical evolution all sorts of games can be accessed via the Internet.

Gambling in Sweden

70 percent of the Swedish population has gambled at least once during the last 12 months, and 44 percent has gambled at least once a month. A third of those who gambled with money during the last year gambled in one form only. The most common gambling forms are lotteries, number games (Lotto, Keno and Joker) and betting on horses. Nine percent of the population has gambled with money on the Internet during the last year.

Eleven percent of the population gambled with money for the first time when they were 12 years old or younger. About half of the population had gambled with money by 18 years of age. The most common first gambling form for women is lotteries and for men it is sports betting.

Almost three percent of the population has spent time gambling with money in their workplace or at school instead of working/studying. This is most common among younger men, among women aged 45 – 64 this figure is two percent.

Gambling is more common among older people than younger and it is more common that men gamble than women. If you are married or cohabiting you are more likely to gamble than if you are single. The share of gamblers is the highest among those with a high school degree as the highest level of education, and lowest among the part of the population with an academic degree. The participation in gambling increases with the level of the income but then decreases in the group with highest income. Internet gambling with money is most common among the 18-44 year olds and twice as common among men than among women in any age group.

The most common gambling form in the population is lotteries; over half of all men and women have bought lottery tickets during the last year. More than a fifth of both men and women have gambled on number games and horses. Men are gambling more on all gambling forms except lotteries, bingo and word games on live TV-shows. The biggest differences between the sexes in gambling forms are for casino games and poker. The gambling pattern also varies with age, socio-economic status, country of birth, family situation and whether you live in a big city or not.

Slightly more than three percent of the population has regularly (six times or more during the last year) gambled on unregulated or illegal gambling forms. For men aged 18-24 the number is above 10 percent.

The result also shows that less than one percent of the population gambled on illegal gambling machines and in poker clubs during the last year. For men aged 18-24 the share is five percent.

Categories of gamblers

The group of the population who gambled during the last year can be divided into three: those who have only gambled a few times, those who gamble every month and those who gamble every week. It is significantly more common among men than women to gamble every week. It is also more common for men to have gambled in many different gambling forms. Men are also gambling for considerably more money.

Using data for gambling frequency and gambling forms we have identified six categories of gamblers:

- non gamblers
- seldom gamblers
- habitual gamblers
- occasional gamblers
- social gamblers
- heavy gamblers.

The largest group is 'the habitual gamblers' which is a category with an even distribution between the sexes, and large majority of persons who are 45 years or older. Many of them have a high school degree as their highest education and the distribution between the different socio-economic groups is comparatively even. The share with Sweden as their country of birth is slightly higher than for the rest of the population. The members of this category gamble on all gambling forms but very few play poker, casino games and on gambling machines.

The 'social gamblers' and 'heavy gamblers' are characterized by the fact that they spend a lot of time on their gambling, they gamble on many gambling forms and they gamble a lot on the Internet. The majority of these groups are men and the share of persons born outside Sweden is equal to the rest of the population. There are also differences between the two categories; 'the social gamblers' are mainly young persons who gamble comparatively seldom and for small amounts. All in this category play poker and many are of a high socio-economic status. The 'heavy gamblers' age varies from 18 to 65. This category spends a lot of money on gambling and gamble often on all gambling forms except number games. Many in this category gamble on horses. A large share of this category is of a medium high socioeconomic status and has a high school degree as their highest level of education.

Both 'occasional gamblers' and 'seldom gamblers' gamble comparatively seldom and for small amounts. The 'occasional gamblers' gamble in many forms except

poker, the 'seldom gamblers' favours lotteries. Many 'occasional gamblers' gamble on gambling machines but not regularly. The 'occasional gamblers' stand out with their comparatively large share of persons of high socio-economic status and persons born outside Europe. The 'seldom gamblers' have a comparatively large share of low socio-economic status and a low share of people born outside Europe. The share of older people is higher among the 'seldom gamblers' in comparison with the 'occasional gamblers'.

Gambling problems

Gambling problems means experiencing negative consequences from gambling. Gambling addiction is a psychiatric diagnosis, where many of the criteria resemble those for alcohol addiction. A public health perspective on gambling problems involves:

- beginning with a scientific knowledge of the population
- focusing on the causes to the ill-health
- working preventive and
- using an overall picture.

Slightly over two percent of the population are problem gamblers (in our report defined as PGSI 3+) and a seventh of these persons have problems so serious that they are likely to need treatment. The share of problem gamblers is higher among men than among women. The highest share of problem gamblers is found among men aged 18–24 where almost every tenth person is a problem gambler. In the oldest age group 65–84 the share of problem gamblers is higher among women than men. The share of problem gamblers are twice as high among the underage gamblers than the population as a whole.

Approximately 260 000 persons in Sweden are living with a problem gambler, 76 000 of these are children. A third of the problem gamblers are closely related to someone else who has gambling problems. Less than one percent of the population states having sought help for gambling problems of their own and approximately two percent states having sought help or information on someone else's behalf.

The share of problem gamblers is higher among those living in a big city compared to those living in the rest of the country. There is also a higher share of problem gamblers among those born outside Sweden compared to those born in Sweden except among young men where the share of gambling problem does not change depending on country of birth.

Families with children have a considerably higher share of problem gamblers compared to couples without children. Single men have a higher share of problem gamblers, disregarding having children or not, compared to married or cohabiting men. Single women with children have a considerably lower share of problem gamblers than all other groups.

Problem gambling is also related to education, income and socio-economic status and the share of problem gamblers is highest among those with the shortest education, lowest income and of a low socio-economic status. There is also a higher share of problem gamblers among those who are on welfare benefits, unemployment benefits and those who have problem with the house hold economy. The highest share of problem gamblers is found among those who from time to time have difficulties with their economy. Men lifting family benefits have a lower share of problem gamblers than other men. For women it is the opposite. Five percent of men and 1.5 percent of the women state gambling profits as a source of income. Within these groups the share of problem gamblers is higher.

There is a clear connection between problem gambling and ill-health. Among those with the most serious gambling problems only 12 percent has a good mental health, compared to 70 percent among non gamblers and gamblers without gambling problems. For the general health a third of those with gambling problems say that their health is good, while 80 percent of the non gamblers and gamblers without gambling problems say that they are in good general health. For men there is a clear connection between problem gambling and alcohol consumption and between problem gambling and smoking. For women a connection can be seen between problem gambling and risky alcohol consumption if you include the people at low risk of developing gambling problems. Men who have been subjected to physical violence have a higher share of gambling problems compared to other men. 13 percent of the men subjected to violence last year are problem gamblers, a similar connection for women has not been found.

A multivariate analysis shows a difference between the sexes regarding the factors that relates to gambling problems. For women the strongest relation to gambling problems was living in a big city. For men the strongest relations were found between gambling problems and mental health, gambling problems and risky alcohol consumption and gambling problems and a birth country other than Sweden. Disregarding sex there is a strong relation between problem gambling and being young and from time to time experiencing problems with your economy

The attitude to one's own gambling is very different for persons with and without gambling problems. The differences in attitude became apparent when valuing statements such as: 'I gamble for more money than I planned' and 'I experience a difficulty in finishing gambling'.

Many gamblers gamble in more than one form and it can be difficult to distinguish a single form above others causing more gambling problems. If you gamble often or not is connected to problem gambling and especially so for poker, gambling machines and casino but also for bingo, live TV-shows and sports gambling. The gambling forms with the highest share of problem gamblers are gambling forms used by a comparatively small part of the population. The connection is strongest between problem gambling and Internet gambling and bingo, thereafter for gambling machines and live TV-shows. Looking solely on those who have only

gambled in one form during the last year, problem gambling occurs in all forms except casino, bingo and live TV-shows.

The share of problem gamblers is higher among those who have played TV and computer games compared to those who have not.

The share of problem gamblers increases the more money and time that are spent gambling. In the group staking 600 crowns or more during the last month, 13 percent of the men and 11 percent of the women are problem gamblers.

Those with a low risk of developing gambling problem together with the problem gamblers constitute 10 percent of the population. These 10 percent are spending half of what the population as a whole spends in money and hours on gambling. The more serious the gambling problem the higher the proportion of the population's total money and time spent on gambling. The persons with serious gambling problems spend 13 times the money and 29 times the time, in relation to their share of the population.

Looking at gambling problems in our earlier defined six categories of gamblers: non gamblers, seldom gamblers, habitual gamblers, occasional gamblers, social gamblers and heavy gamblers, we find that problem gambling occurs in all gambling categories but to the greatest extent with the 'social gamblers' and the 'heavy gamblers' – The largest share of male problem gamblers are 'heavy gamblers' and the female problem gamblers are mainly 'social gamblers'.

Efforts against gambling problems

In Sweden, the only national overall contribution to counteract gambling addiction is carried out by the Swedish National Institute of Public Health (SNIPH) on commission by the Government. The subsidy has increased from 4 million Swedish crowns in 1999 to 28 millions in 2009. The efforts include preventive interventions, development of knowledge and treatment methods. The first interventions included a national help-line for gamblers and their families and distribution of subsidies to gambling addiction organizations. Additionally, the SNIPH has administered training to professional groups, followed the development of the gambling market in different studies, published surveys and developed different forms of treatment for gambling addiction that have been evaluated with positive results.

The gambling industry has also contributed with efforts that aim to prevent gambling problems. Examples of such efforts are; the phone number to the national helpline for gamblers (Stödlinjen) is printed on all coupons, lottery- and gambling tickets; different possibilities for gamblers to voluntarily limit their stakes, tools that show the amount of time or money spent, and the possibility to exclude oneself from gambling. These efforts from the industry, however, are not scientifically evaluated. Most of the Swedish gambling companies also cooperate in ethical questions regarding marketing and in some cases a lower age-limit than legally required has been introduced.

Comparisons with earlier Swedish and international studies

Epidemiological studies on gambling with money and gambling problems is a comparatively new area of research. In the 1990's, studies were carried out in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, USA, Great Britain and Sweden. In the 2000's some of these studies have been repeated and new studies have been carried out in all Nordic countries, several countries in Europe and studies in South Africa, Singapore and Hong Kong.

The share of the population who has gambled the last year has decreased from 88 to 70 percent since the last Swedish epidemiological study from 1997/98. The participation in gambling has decreased in all groups within the population, both for men and for women. The largest reduction of gambling is among people aged 16–17, where lotteries and gambling on machines are the gambling forms that have decreased the most. During the period there has been a large increase of people who play poker games among the young men and of people who gamble on horses among the middle aged and the older women.

The share of problem gamblers is consistent on just over two percent of the total of the population compared to the 1997/98 study. When we look at women and men in different age groups, there are however some reasonably large changes behind these numbers. The share of problem gamblers has decreased among boys 16–17 years old and women 18–44 years old. The age and gender groups where the shares of problem gamblers have increased are men 18–24 years old and women 45–74 years old. Both these groups have doubled their share of problem gamblers in just over ten years. This means that almost every tenth young man and 0.5 percent of middle aged and older women are problem gamblers today. The unchanged groups are girls 16–17 years old and men from 25 years of age. There has also been a displacement where the share of people with serious gambling problems has increased, mainly among men 18–44 years old.

Problem gambling at some time of your life correlated in 1997/98 with education, living in a larger city or not, if you were born abroad and if you lived in a family with younger children. These correlations are also found in SWELOGS, but are true both for problem gambling some time in your life and for problem gambling the last year. In regard to the family situation, the share of people with gambling problems has decreased among singles and increased among married/ cohabitants.

The fact that the share of people who has gambled during the last year in the population has decreased correlates well with international studies. This is also true for the results that show that:

- Men gamble more often and for more money than women.
- Young people and people born abroad gamble less but have gambling problems to a greater extent.
- Socio-economically vulnerable persons have gambling problems to a larger extent compared to people with higher education and good economy.

- There is a clear connection between mental ill-health and gambling problems.

The Public Health Agency of Sweden is an expert authority with responsibility for public health issues at a national level. The Agency develops and supports activities to promote health, prevent illness and improve preparedness for health threats.

Our vision statement: a public health that strengthens the positive development of society.



Folkhälsomyndigheten
PUBLIC HEALTH AGENCY OF SWEDEN

Solna Nobels väg 18, SE-171 82 Solna **Östersund** Forskarens väg 3, SE-831 40 Östersund.

www.folkhalsomyndigheten.se