



What do we know about gambling problems in Sweden 2014?

This fact sheet is a summary of the knowledge that we have accumulated through the Swedish Longitudinal Gambling Study, Swelogs. The study investigates gambling, gambling problems and health from a public health perspective and is conducted by the Public Health Agency of Sweden. Swelogs is expected to continue until 2015.

Problem gambling is a public health problem

In Sweden, excessive gambling has been a component of national public health policy since 2003, which is why we approach gambling problems from a public health perspective. In short, the perspective entails that gambling problems are conceptualised as a continuum that incorporates all levels of gambling problems, from at-risk gambling where the negative consequences are limited, to gambling disorders where the harmful effects are severe. The term 'gambling problems' is used in a more general sense to describe the social, financial or health consequences of a person's gambling.¹ Swelogs mainly uses the following terms:

- 'At-risk gambling' where the gambler experiences some negative consequences from gambling.²
- 'Problem gambling' is a term for gambling that results in severe or more serious negative consequences and presumably also more severe problems.³

Around two percent of Sweden's population are currently problem gamblers. Many problem gamblers move in and out of the problem gambling category over time. Gambling problems often affect partners, children and friends. Therefore, a much larger group of people are affected by gambling problems than just the individual gambler.

Problem gamblers are a particularly vulnerable group in society. They are more prone to poor general health, mental health problems and are often more socially and financially vulnerable compared to those who do not have a problem with gambling.

We also know that it is possible to prevent problem gambling. For example, the proportion of problem gamblers among

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. The degree of gambling problems was assessed based on the measurement instrument Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI).

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young people (16–17 years) decreased from 1997/1998 to 2008/2009, which coincided with the introduction of age limits on most forms of gambling in the latter part of this period.

Distinguishing features of at-risk gambling and problem gambling

At-risk gamblers for the most part have problems associated with a loss of control over their finances. More than 40 percent of at-risk gamblers said that they have returned to gamble in order to recoup gambling losses. Problem gamblers often have more numerous and/or more severe financial problems. They frequently experience feelings of guilt, develop health problems, need to keep betting larger and larger sums of money and many have been criticised by others for their gambling and have borrowed money or sold possessions to finance their gambling.

▶▶▶ Read more about at-risk gambling and problem gambling in Swelogs fact sheets 13 and 14. They can be downloaded at www.folkhalsomyndigheten.se

Do you need help with your own gambling problem or somebody else's?

A helpline for gamblers and their family and friends is available via phone, e-mail or chat: www.stodlinjen.se/other-languages/in-english/, phone no +46 (0)20-81 91 00

1. The Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI) is an instrument developed for distinguishing different levels of gambling problems in population studies.
2. At-risk gambling is defined as 1 or 2 points on PGSI
3. Problem gambling is defined as 3 points or more on PGSI

Gambling and health

- Approximately 70 percent of Sweden's population has gambled during the past year. This is a decline of 20 percentage points since 1997/1998.
- By far the most common form of gambling is lotteries followed by number games, horse racing and sports betting.
- The percentage of gamblers with risky drinking habits is highest among those who gamble on gambling machines, poker and casino games (approx. 40 percent, compared to 14 percent of the general population).
- Gamblers who gamble on gambling machines, poker, casino games and TV based gambling have the lowest proportion of good mental health (approx. 60 percent, compared to roughly 68 percent of the general population).
 ▶▶▶ Read more about the different gambling forms and health in Swelogs fact sheets 1–9. They can be downloaded at www.folkhalsomyndigheten.se
- Young people aged 16–17 gamble on all gambling forms despite the 18 year age limit on gambling in Sweden. However, we have seen a decrease in both gambling and problem gambling among young people (16–17 years) in the last decade.

Gambling problems

- The proportion of problem gamblers in the population remains unchanged at around 2 percent (from 1997/1998 to 2008/2009). However, there have been a number of changes between different population groups. Problem gambling has, for example, doubled among men aged 18–24 and has increased among women aged 45–64, while it has been declining among young people aged 16–17.
- In the same time period, the number of people who at some point in their lives have had severe gambling problems has doubled, increasing from 1 to 2 percent.
- Five percent of the population are at-risk gamblers.
- The results show there is great mobility in and out of problem gambling while at the same time the proportion of the population with gambling problems remains

unchanged. In one year around 100,000 people become new problem gamblers and at the same time roughly the same number move out of the problem gambling category. One in five new problem gamblers are relapsed gamblers. The vast majority of relapsed gamblers are men.

- Approximately half of all new problem gamblers in 2009/2010 were women, so we may see the number of men and women problem gamblers even out over time. In Sweden and in most other countries, men are affected by problem gambling to a much higher extent than women.
- On average, new problem gamblers gamble on a more limited range of gambling forms than those who continue to have gambling problems.
- Almost one in ten people who gamble on bingo, poker, casino games and/or gambling machines are problem gamblers.
 ▶▶▶ Read more about gambling problems in the reports "Gambling and gambling problems in Sweden 2008/2009" and in the English summaries of other Swelogs reports, as well as Swelogs fact sheets 10, 12 and 17. These reports and fact sheets can be downloaded or ordered at www.folkhalsomyndigheten.se

Differences between population groups

- Gambling problems exist in all population groups. However, it is more prevalent in population groups that are already vulnerable such as people with a lower level of education, lower income and among people born abroad – despite the fact that they often gamble less frequently than the rest of the population. This finding confirms similar results from international research. There is also a larger proportion of problem gamblers among single parents, people on allowance support, unemployment benefits or those who have problems with their household finances.
- We see similar patterns among new problem gamblers (those who have become problem gamblers in the past year). For men, however, there was no difference in the level of education among new problem gamblers, and most of the new problem gamblers were younger. For

	2008/2009	2009/2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Epidemiological track	EP I n = 15 000 Age group 16–84	EP II n = 8 165 Age group 17–85		EP III n = 7 064 Age group 19–87		EP IV n ~ 7 000 Age group 21–89	
In-depth track			ID I n = 2 400 Age group 18–86		ID II n ~ 2 000 Age group 20–88		ID III n ~ 2 000 Age group 22–90
Follow-up track	n = 578 Age group 27–85						



women, the proportion of new problem gamblers is highest among those with a low level of education and in the 45–64 age group.

- Problem gambling is most common among young men. Approximately one in ten men between the age of 16 and 24 is a problem gambler.

▶▶▶ Read more about the differences between population groups in the reports “Gambling and gambling problems in Sweden 2008/2009” and in the English summaries of other Swelogs reports. The reports can be downloaded or ordered at www.folkhalsomyndigheten.se

Gambling and gender

- When we compare gambling in 1997/1998 with 2008/2009 we can see that there are still gender differences in gambling behaviour: men gamble more often, on more gambling forms, bet more money and are more likely to be problem gamblers than women. In general, men and women choose different forms of gambling. Men often choose to gamble on games of strategy while women generally prefer games of chance.
- Among men and women who gamble regularly on the same gambling forms, the proportion of problem gamblers is equal.
- There are nevertheless a number of important differences between male and female regular gamblers. Women are more likely to bet more than they can afford compared with men. Another example is that women who gamble regularly on games of chance in the home environment (which include lotteries and other forms of gambling that are often seen as less risky, but also high-risk games of chance on the Internet, such as online bingo) are more at risk of developing gambling problems than men who gamble in the same way.

▶▶▶ A PhD project about gender and gambling problems has been completed within the Swelogs framework. The main results of the thesis will be described in an upcoming report.

Concerned significant others and gambling problems

- We know that gambling problems are not only problematic for the individual problem gambler. Almost one in five people in Sweden between the ages of 16 and 84, roughly 18 percent, have someone close to them who currently has, or used to have, a gambling problem. An equal proportion of men and women are concerned significant others to someone with a gambling problem. Swelogs confirms the results of other studies that show that concerned significant others of people who have or used to have gambling problems have poorer health and are more likely to have social or financial problems. We have also observed that the problems of significant others who continue to be close to a problem gambler persisted after one year, while those who said they were

no longer close to someone with a gambling problem reported improved health and better finances.

▶▶▶ Read more about concerned significant others and gambling problems in Swelogs fact sheet no 15, which can be downloaded or ordered at www.folkhalsomyndigheten.se

Risk, protection and recovery factors in problem gambling

Knowledge about the factors that influence problem gambling is still fairly limited, but Swelogs has produced new knowledge in the field. As the Swelogs study spans several years, we have observed a difference over time between the factors presented below and problem gambling (except for two factors, where specified).

Risk factors

- Personal relationships play an important part in the development of problem gambling. Divorce, separation and the death of a significant other leads to an increased risk of problem gambling.
 - Gambling during school or work time leads to an increased risk of problem gambling.
 - TV and computer gaming increases the risk of developing problem gambling.
 - Gambling form and gambling frequency influences the risk of developing gambling problems. People who gamble every month or more on gambling forms with a high risk potential run a much higher risk of developing gambling problems. One of the main distinguishing features of high-risk gambling is the duration of the round in each game. The shorter the interval between placing a bet, the outcome and placing another bet on the same game, the higher the risk potential. Gambling forms with a high risk potential include casino games, poker and gambling machines.
- ▶▶▶ Read more about the risk potential of different gambling forms in Swelogs fact sheet no. 16, which can be downloaded or ordered at www.folkhalsomyndigheten.se
- Former alcohol or drug problems, an insecure upbringing and impulsivity lead to an increased risk of problem gambling later in life.
 - A risky drinking habit increases the risk of problem gambling. This correlation is particularly evident among those who developed a risky drinking habit during the past year. Consuming alcohol while gambling also increases the risk of problem gambling. The correlation between problem gambling and alcohol consumption is particularly strong for gambling machines.

An in-depth study is being conducted within the Swelogs framework. In the study we follow a selection of roughly 2,000 people between 2011 and 2015 from the Swelogs study. The main purpose of the in-depth study is to identify risk and protective factors for gambling problems.
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- Former gambling problems increase the probability of developing gambling problems again (i.e. relapsing).
- The belief that you can make a profit from gambling also contributes to the risk of developing gambling problems. We still do not know whether this misconception arises before, during or after the person develops gambling problems.
- Deteriorating mental health in the past year leads to an increased risk of problem gambling.

Protective factors

- Having friends who do not think that gambling is important co-varies with a lower risk of problem gambling. We still do not know whether this arises before, in conjunction with or after the person develops gambling problems.
- Good general health protects people from developing gambling problems.

Factors that affect the possibility of recovery

- Never having had an alcohol or drug problem or a former gambling problem can facilitate the recovery from problem gambling.
- Divorce or separation can reduce the possibility of recovery.

▶▶▶ Read more about factors that affect problem gambling in the report "Gambling and gambling problems in Sweden 2008/2009" and in the English summaries of other Swelogs reports. The reports can be downloaded or ordered at www.folkhalsomyndigheten.se

Is gambling the most enjoyable thing there is?

Nearly 20 percent of at-risk gamblers and 40 percent of problem gamblers agree fully or partially that gambling is the most enjoyable thing there is. Among those who gamble without any problems, 4 percent agree with the same question. It appears that the more enjoyable you find gambling to be, the greater the negative consequences you encounter.

▶▶▶ Read more about "happy gamblers" in Swelogs fact sheet no. 11 which can be downloaded or ordered at www.folkhalsomyndigheten.se

Aspects we need to know more about

- What are the short- and long-term harms of gambling problems and how do they differ between different population groups?
- How does problem gambling correlate with other factors over a longer time perspective? A longer time perspective is necessary for learning more about, and being certain about, the roles that different risk, protective and recovery factors play.
- How do risk and protective factors differ between environments and contexts? Does the normalisation of gambling (e.g. different attitudes to poker) influence the development of gambling problems within risk groups?
- How do the factors of the individual gambler interact with the factors in the immediate environment and in larger social structures? Can, for example, the availability of various gambling forms affect the development of gambling problems?
- How can problem gambling be prevented effectively? How can various forms of gambling be made less risky?

Want to know more?



You can read more about gambling, gambling problems and health in Sweden in our reports and fact sheets. You can download or order them at our website www.folkhalsomyndigheten.se. You can also read more at our website www.spelprevention.se (in Swedish).

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