

Gambling Harms

Insight into gambling within Blackpool

2026



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About Empowerment Charity

Empowerment is a Blackpool based charity with a long-term commitment to supporting our local communities and improving lives. At its heart, Empowerment is about making sure that people feel listened to, respected, and supported no matter who they are or where they come from.

We do not deliver services to people, we work alongside them. Our belief is simple: you empower yourself, with encouragement and support from us. Whether it's through advocacy, co-production, or tackling social challenges such as domestic abuse, isolation, or mental ill health, our mission is to stand with people so they can bring about real and positive change in their own lives and in their community.



Empowerment is more than an organisation, it's a community of people who believe that change is possible when we are united. We are local, rooted in Blackpool and the Fylde Coast, and proud of it. We welcome everyone, celebrate diversity, and believe in collaboration over competition. We take risks when needed, admit when we get things wrong, and always strive to do better.

Empowerment is about voices being heard, lives being changed, and communities being strengthened. We are small and local, but our impact is big because together, with the people of Blackpool and the Fylde Coast, we are creating a kinder, fairer, and more hopeful future.

Our values



Working with
Kindness



Working for
Justice



Working towards
Equality for everyone



We are
Human



Introduction

Gambling is a widely practised activity across the UK, however for some individuals, it can lead to harmful consequences affecting financial stability, relationships, and overall health and wellbeing. Gambling related harms are increasingly recognised as a Public Health issue, as the impacts can extend beyond the individual to affect families, communities, and local services.

Across Blackpool, Fylde and Wyre, gambling is a visible part of the environment due to the town's strong links with tourism and entertainment. Locally, there are 204 betting shops, alongside access to 24 hour casinos and gaming venues. Evidence also shows that gambling premises are often located in areas experiencing higher levels of deprivation, with 29% situated in the most deprived postcodes by crime, and 20% in the most deprived postcodes by health. This concentration may increase exposure to gambling within communities already experiencing social and health inequalities.

Public attitudes and awareness can also influence how gambling harms are recognised and addressed. Research suggests that one in three people believe gambling is not a problem if an individual can afford it, despite evidence that gambling addiction is linked to behavioural dependency and loss of control, rather than financial circumstances alone. This highlights the importance of increasing awareness and reducing stigma around gambling harms, so that individuals feel able to seek support when needed.



Gambling harms can affect individuals in a range of ways, including relationship breakdowns, financial difficulties, changes in behaviour, sleep disruption, and declining mental wellbeing. The wider community can also experience impacts, including increased crime, reduced workplace productivity, and greater demand on local health and social support systems. As a result, local authorities, charities, and health services are increasingly working together to address gambling harms through prevention, awareness, and accessible support.

Introduction

In Blackpool, Empowerment Charity provides specialist support for individuals and families affected by gambling, supported by Public Health Blackpool. Our gambling related harms services offers one-to-one peer support from individuals with lived experience, guidance on self-exclusion from gambling venues, and support for those affected by another person's gambling.

To help inform this work, a survey was undertaken to gather insight into local experiences, awareness, and perceptions of gambling related harms. The survey explored whether individuals had experienced gambling harms themselves or through someone they know, assessed awareness of available support services, and gathered views on what support Blackpool could offer to individuals and families affected by gambling.

The findings from this project will help inform future local Public Health approaches, awareness initiatives and support services, ensuring that responses to gambling harms are shaped by the experiences and needs of people living in Blackpool.





Methodology

Survey design

A cross-sectional survey was designed to explore gambling behaviours, experiences, and support needs among individuals in Blackpool. The survey was structured to capture both quantitative and qualitative data, covering a range of topics including gambling frequency, types of gambling, financial and personal impacts, awareness of support services, and demographic characteristics.

The survey focused on the following key areas:

- Whether respondents, or someone they know, had engaged in gambling within the previous four weeks
- The types of gambling activities people had participated in
- Experiences of gambling beyond affordable limits
- The impact of gambling-related harms, including financial difficulties or relationship problems
- Awareness of where to access help and support for gambling-related harm
- Suggestions for what support services Blackpool could offer to individuals affected by gambling

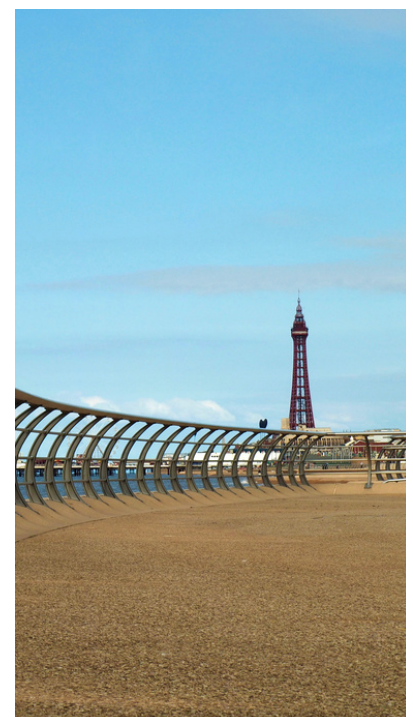
Additional demographic questions were included to better understand the profile of respondents, including postcode area, gender, age, ethnicity, and employment status. Respondents were also given the option to provide further feedback and leave contact details if they wished to be involved in future work, relating to gambling harms peer support.

Survey distribution and data collection

The survey was promoted through online channels and community networks to encourage participation from individuals across Blackpool. The aim was to gather a broad range of perspectives, including those who may have experienced gambling harms themselves, and those who may have observed the impacts within their social or family networks.

Participation in the survey was voluntary, and open-ended questions allowed individuals to provide additional context or share personal experiences where appropriate. Respondents were informed that their responses were anonymous and treated confidentially.

In total, **86 individuals** contributed to the project through survey participation.



Methodology

Data analysis

Quantitative data from closed-ended questions were analysed using descriptive statistics to summarise gambling behaviours, impacts, and demographic characteristics.

Qualitative responses from open-ended questions were reviewed and analysed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes, experiences, and suggestions for improving support services in Blackpool. These insights helped provide deeper context to the statistical findings and highlighted areas where individuals felt additional support or awareness may be needed.

Ethical considerations

Participation in the survey was anonymous and voluntary, and respondents were informed that their responses would be used to help understand experiences of gambling harms and inform future support initiatives.

Some survey questions asked about potentially sensitive experiences related to gambling and its impacts. To ensure participant comfort, respondents were able to skip any questions they did not wish to answer.



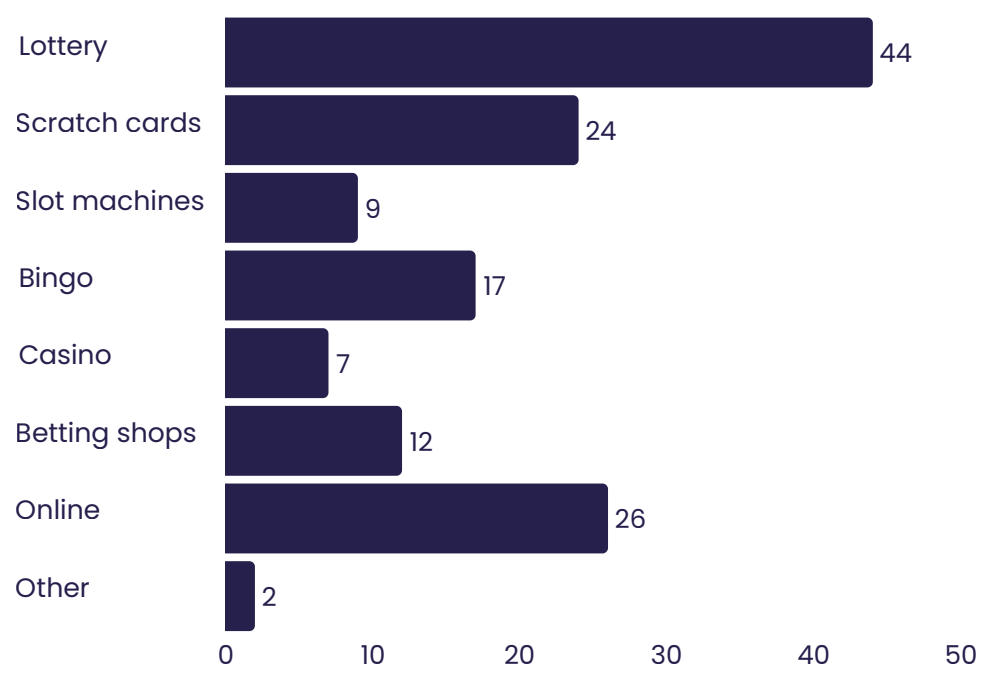


Survey Findings

During the last 4 weeks, have you or someone you know engaged in any form of gambling?

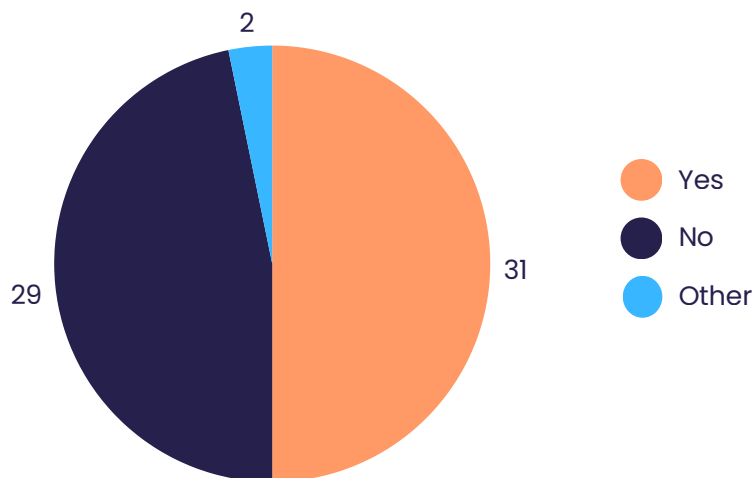


Please select all the forms of gambling that you/the person you know has used within the last 4 weeks?



Other comments included; "horses, sport, dog track, poker," and "radio competition."

Have you or someone you know, ever gambled more than you can afford?



Other comments included; *"They won't say how much they spend,"* and *"Depends."*

If you feel comfortable, please provide further information about this:

Of the 31 respondents who answered "yes," 17 individuals reported that they or someone they knew had gambled beyond their financial means. Participants described a variety of gambling activities, including online and land-based casinos, bookmakers, and scratch cards. Many reported that this had caused financial hardship, making it difficult to cover everyday essentials. Some also described extreme measures taken to fund gambling, such as selling children's possessions, engaging in theft, or relying heavily on family and friends.

“

"The individual I know was spending more than they had, which caused them to have less for their individual needs i.e. rent, food."

"My brother would steal to gamble from an early age and has now lost everything."

"Ex partner gambled more than he could afford – online betting and casino's."

"Used my rent money to gamble with and borrowed money from family and friends."

"Myself and my ex partner used to spend every penny we had and steal to spend that on gambling."

”



12 respondents identified as “affected others,” meaning they were impacted by someone else’s gambling, rather than gambling themselves. These findings highlight that gambling does not only affect the individual engaging in it, but can also have significant consequences for family members, loved ones, friends and colleagues.

“

“My brother has been a gambler for many years. He lost everything from gambling; his wife, children, siblings and home.”

“My friends partner used to sell the children’s possessions to fund his gambling habit.”

”

“

“Ex partner gambled a lot, so much so had to stop his accounts and get other people to place his bets to control it.”

“My father put a horse racing bet on most days of his adult life, even though we were so poor.”

”

A further 5 respondents reported that they began engaging in gambling activities during early adolescence. Many described being first exposed to gambling, such as slot machines and bookmakers, at a young age, which became part of their regular routine. Early exposure often coincided with a longer history of gambling and the development of deep rooted gambling patterns, extending into adulthood.

“

“My brother would steal to gamble from a very early age and has lost everything with alcohol and gambling. Although now not homeless, he still gambles.”

“I grew up with a gambling brother; it started at a very young age.”

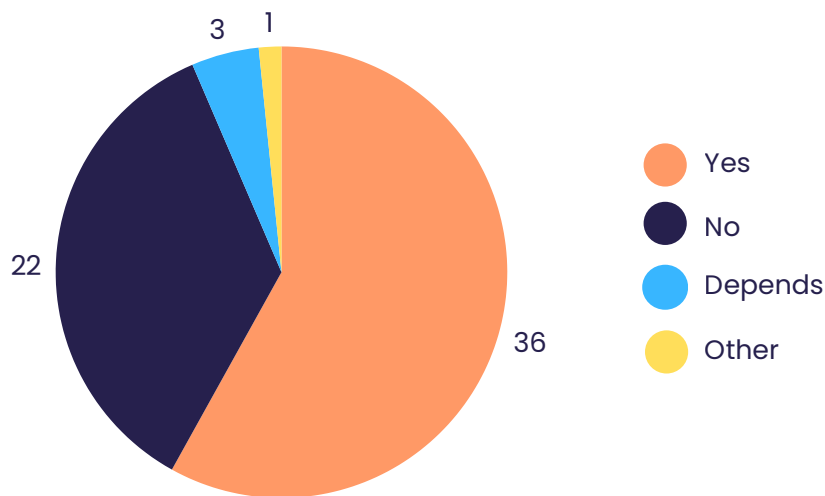
“My brother had an issue with gambling when he was young and would spend all his money on gambling machines.”

“My cousin, due to the Blackpool arcades, started gambling while still at school and has been in and out of rehab for years. He has lost relationships and always relapses as there are so many ways he can gamble.”

”



Has gambling ever caused you, or somebody you know, problems? e.g. financial problems? relationship breakdowns?



Other comments included "Not sure."

If you feel comfortable, please provide further information about the problems you have faced:

Of the 30 respondents who answered "yes," 18 reported that they or someone they knew had experienced financial hardship due to gambling. Participants described borrowing money from relatives, experiencing relationship breakdowns, and sometimes lying about their finances to manage the consequences of gambling.

“

“Unfortunately, most people gamble more than they can afford. Growing up in Blackpool I developed a bad problem playing fruit machines from when I was 14–18 years old, to the point I ended up leaving university during my first year having spent my loan gambling and not having attended seminars and lectures.”

“Credit card debt, addictive behaviours, impulsive.”

“Friends having to borrow money after gambling.”

”



8 respondents reported experiencing relationship breakdowns as a result of gambling. Several indicated that they had lied to their partners, family members, or friends about money spent and their whereabouts, often to conceal the extent of their gambling. These findings suggest that gambling harms extend beyond the individual, affecting their wider support networks.

“

“Issues within relationships, not keeping in contact with family members, ghosting, lying about where they are and the amount of money lost. Disappearing for long periods of time playing in private houses through the night after finished in the pubs.”

“Family suffer the consequences of all this, bailing him out with debts, his anger has caused fights, the lies are like you wouldn’t believe.”

“My brother and I fell out as he borrowed money off me and couldn’t afford to pay me back.”

”

7 respondents experienced mental or physical health issues as a perceived consequence of gambling, illustrating the broader impact of this, beyond financial loss. Mental health concerns included distress, anxiety, and impulsiveness, whilst physical health issues often arose from neglect of personal care. These findings highlight the need for holistic, wraparound support that addresses not only financial recovery, but also psychological and physical wellbeing.

“

“He had no money to pay for a roof over his head, or to feed himself. He started to be unkept and smell due to only having his locker at work to store his clothes, so he only had the clothes he would wear and another set. His health deteriorated with infections in his feet due to them being wet as at night after work he would walk the streets until it was late and then he would find a toilet to sleep in.”

”

“

“Causing deceit and affecting mental health.”

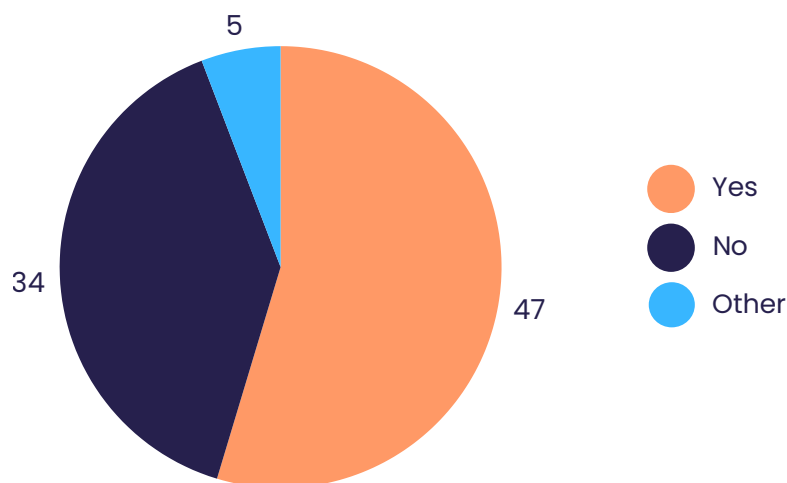
“Anger, anxiety, debts, loss of relationships, loss of property.”

“Financial problems, mental health problems, intrusive thoughts.”

”

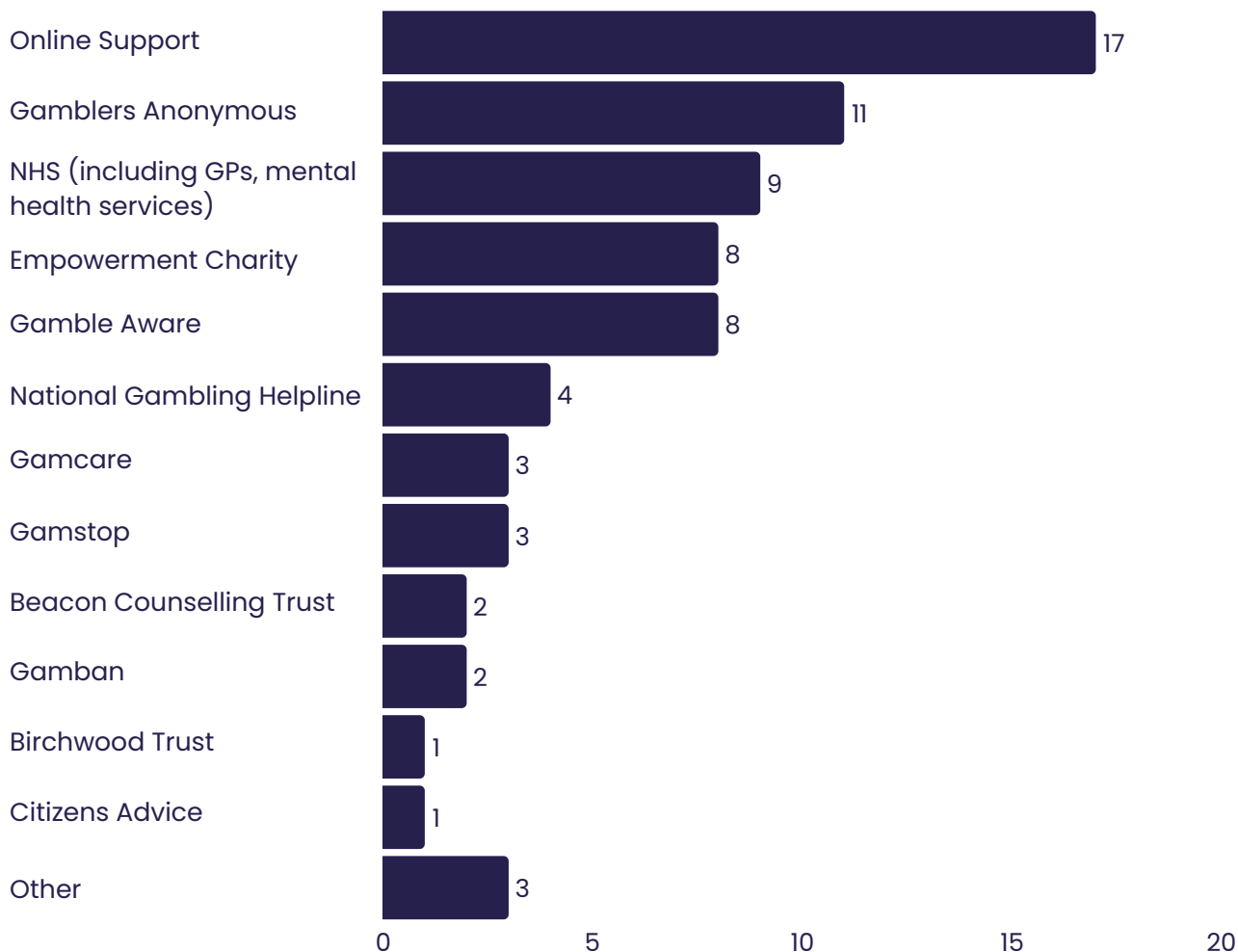


If you, or someone you know, were affected by gambling, would you know where to go for help and support?



Other comments included; "I would do an internet search and find out that way," "Yes but it doesn't feel like there is much available," "I have researched gambling society's," and 2 responses of "Not sure."

Please provide further information as to where you would seek help and support:



Other comments included; "FYI Directory," "Many places advertised on TV," and "Workplace has counselling and advice services."



What help and support do you think Blackpool could offer for people affected by gambling?

Enhanced one to one and wraparound support for gambling harm

17 respondents highlighted the importance of wraparound support that extends beyond one off interventions, alongside one to one assistance delivered through multiple channels, such as telephone helplines, text messaging services, and online chat platforms. 5 participants specifically emphasised the value of counselling sessions, noting that these can provide a safe, non-judgemental environment in which individuals are able to explore their behaviours and access tailored behavioural interventions. There was also a strong call for earlier, more targeted support for young people, as well as more responsive and inclusive services for individuals currently experiencing gambling-related harms.

“

“Wrap around support.”

“Treatment options and support.”

“Counselling.”

“121 assistance / online support / telephone support.”

“Behavioural intervention support.”

”

“

“Better support for those who have an active issue”

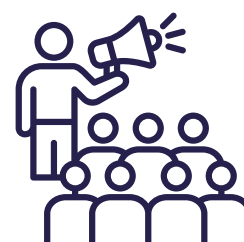
“Continuous support not just a one off.”

“More support to young people.”

”

Education

Education was highlighted by 11 respondents as essential for reducing gambling-related harm and increasing awareness of support. Participants emphasised the importance of early education for young people, alongside raising parental awareness of access via digital platforms, and promoting open conversations to reduce stigma. Respondents also outlined the need to help individuals understand triggers and develop practical coping strategies. Suggestions included integrating gambling education into PSHE lessons, providing workplace training to recognise early warning signs, and increasing the visibility of support information in gambling venues, such as casinos and arcades.



“

“Teaching young people at an early age about the impact of gambling. Teaching parents about how young people can access sites on their phones.”

“More education on the help available.”

“I think they could educate more – education is prevention – by educating you raise awareness and start talking more openly about Gambling which then in turn helps reduce stigma which is attached to it. They could deliver sessions in school PSHE lessons.”

“Helping understand what prompts addictive behaviour & measures to stop or control it better would be useful.”

“Education sessions/drop ins to discuss. Talks in the work place for government/local government, which would support customers but also the staff themselves.”

”

Expanding access to local gambling support groups

Local support groups were identified by 24 respondents as a key component, highlighting the importance of accessible, community-based support that individuals can engage with early and confidentially. 3 participants emphasised the value of peer-to-peer and peer-led groups, which can enable individuals to share experiences and receive support in a safe and comfortable environment.

There was a clear demand for more locally available groups, including alternatives to traditional 12-step models, as well as increased provision of groups similar to Gamblers Anonymous, noted by 5 respondents. A multi-channel approach was recommended, with online meetings supporting those with work or other commitments, alongside in-person options. Improved promotion of group availability, along with links to wider support, such as debt advice, was also seen as essential.

“

“Online meetings would benefit people with work commitments. Face-to-face groups that are not specifically 12 steps. Encourage Gamblers Anonymous participants to set up more GA meetings.”

“More support groups like Gamblers Anonymous, make it clear where they will be and what time so people are aware.”

“Put you in touch with groups who could offer advice and self-help.”

“Support group, confidential support, help with debt.”

“Peer led groups.”

“Groups drop ins.”



”



Improved awareness of gambling risks and support services

13 participants highlighted the need for more visible, accessible, and widespread communication about the risks of gambling and the support available. Individuals suggested raising public awareness through targeted social media campaigns, alongside the use of posters and flyers in settings such as GP surgeries, dentists, gyms, family hubs, and gambling venues.

Participants also called for a stronger community presence, including dedicated spaces for gambling harms support. Clearer messaging about how gambling can escalate into harm was seen as important, alongside the development of tools such as self-assessment resources to support early recognition. In addition, training and awareness sessions for practitioners and community staff were identified as key to improving early identification and intervention.

“

“Raise awareness, maybe create a self-assessment tool for people to complete. Put support information in more public spaces.”

“Advertise your support on Social Media, posters, flyers in GPs, gyms, and other recreational organisations.”

”

“

“More visibility of where to get support.”

“They could have posters of the support services all around building where there are gambling facilities.”

“Advertising in Doctors/dentists, family hubs.”

”

Strengthening gambling controls and regulations

7 participants highlighted the need for stricter restrictions and regulations, reflecting support for a Public Health focused approach to reducing gambling-related harm. Participants called for tighter controls on the availability and visibility of gambling, including limits on the number of betting shops and casinos, reduced access to high-risk products such as slot machines, and the introduction of local planning policies to prevent area saturation.

Concerns were also raised about the normalisation of gambling through advertising, particularly in sports and daytime media. Participants suggested banning or significantly restricting adverts and sponsorships that present gambling as aspirational. In addition, respondents emphasised the need for practical safeguards, such as tools that allow individuals to limit their spending without affecting their credit scores.





“

“Developing a bookmakers planning policy to limit the number of gambling shops in saturation zones the same as we do with off licences – it’s a public health issue and should be treated as such. We should also lobby government to ban gambling adds on the TV – they all portray gambling as a fun lifestyle which it plainly isn’t.”

“Ways to limit spending without impacting credit report.”

“Removal of slot machines in betting shops.”

“I listen to TalkSport daily with my kids in the car etc. and it’s constantly on about gambling, I think that’s really poor and they shouldn’t be advertising gambling before the watershed.”

“More restrictions on the number, types and availability of gambling in Blackpool with less visible advertising.”

”

Other

Other suggestions focused on creating more person-centred, non-judgemental spaces to encourage honest conversations and reduce stigma. Participants noted that accessible recreational activities could help reduce reliance on gambling as a source of enjoyment or escape. There was a strong view that enhancing overall wellbeing and addressing isolation can serve as protective factors, as individuals who feel connected are less likely to develop problematic gambling behaviours.

“

“Give people opportunities to connect and feel useful in ways that won’t impact them financially (people are often afraid of losing their benefits if they volunteer anywhere). Happy people are less likely to be problem gamblers.”

“I think we could offer more person centred and non-judgemental spaces.”

”

“

“Other activities to engage with instead of gambling.”

“In addition to focused gambling interventions, offering people opportunities for connection and enjoyment would go a long way to helping.”

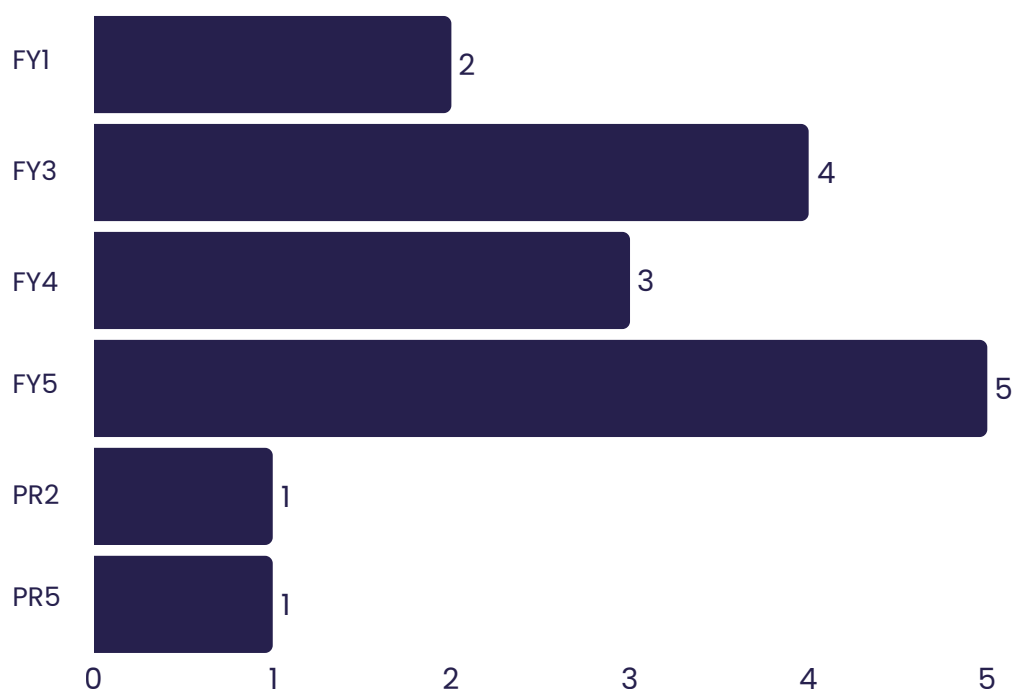
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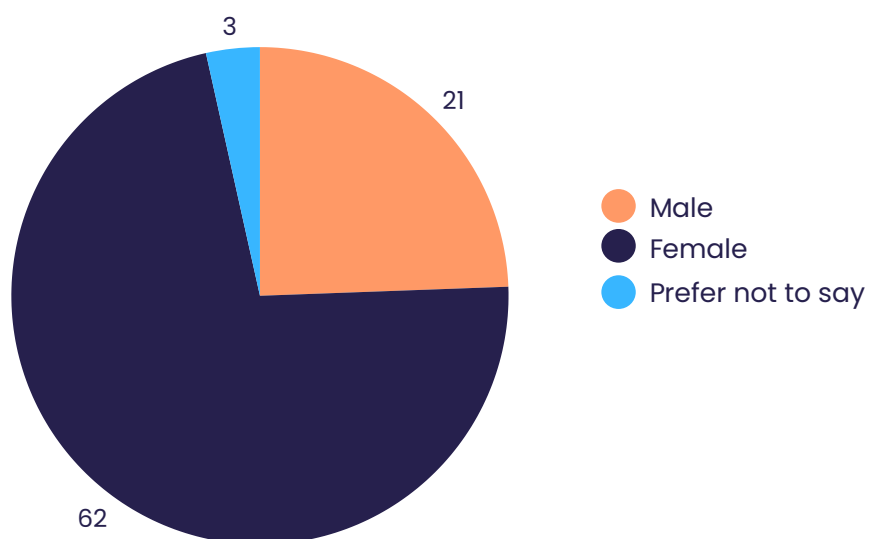


Demographics

Please enter the first half of your postcode, e.g. FY2:

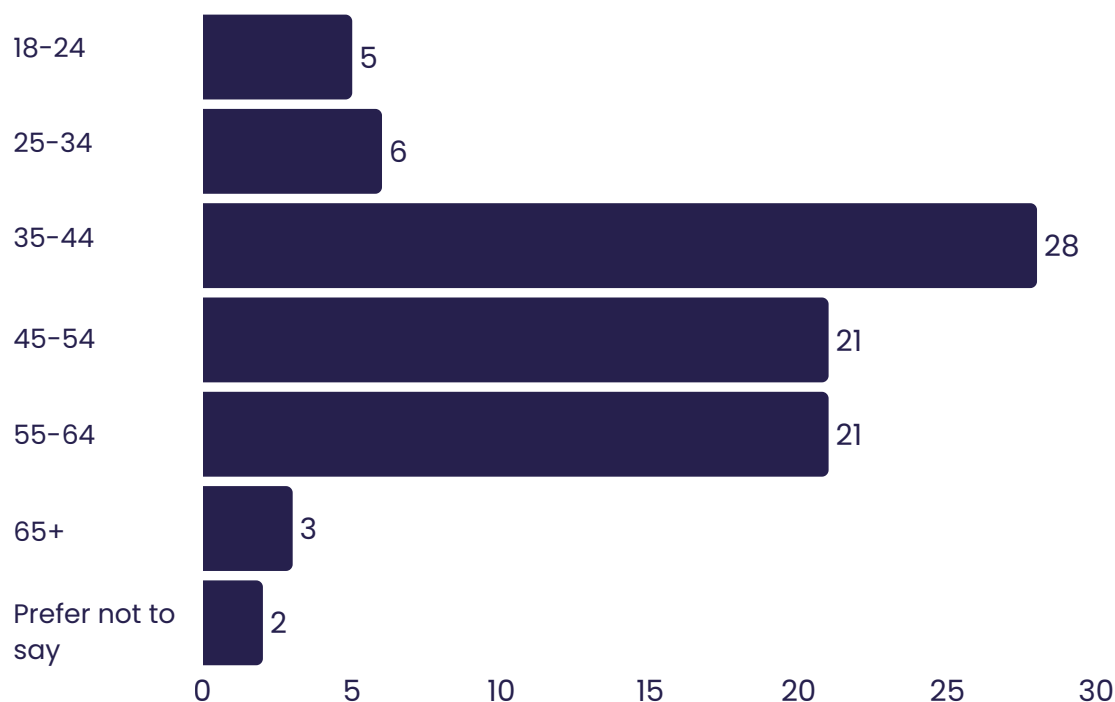


What gender do you identify as?

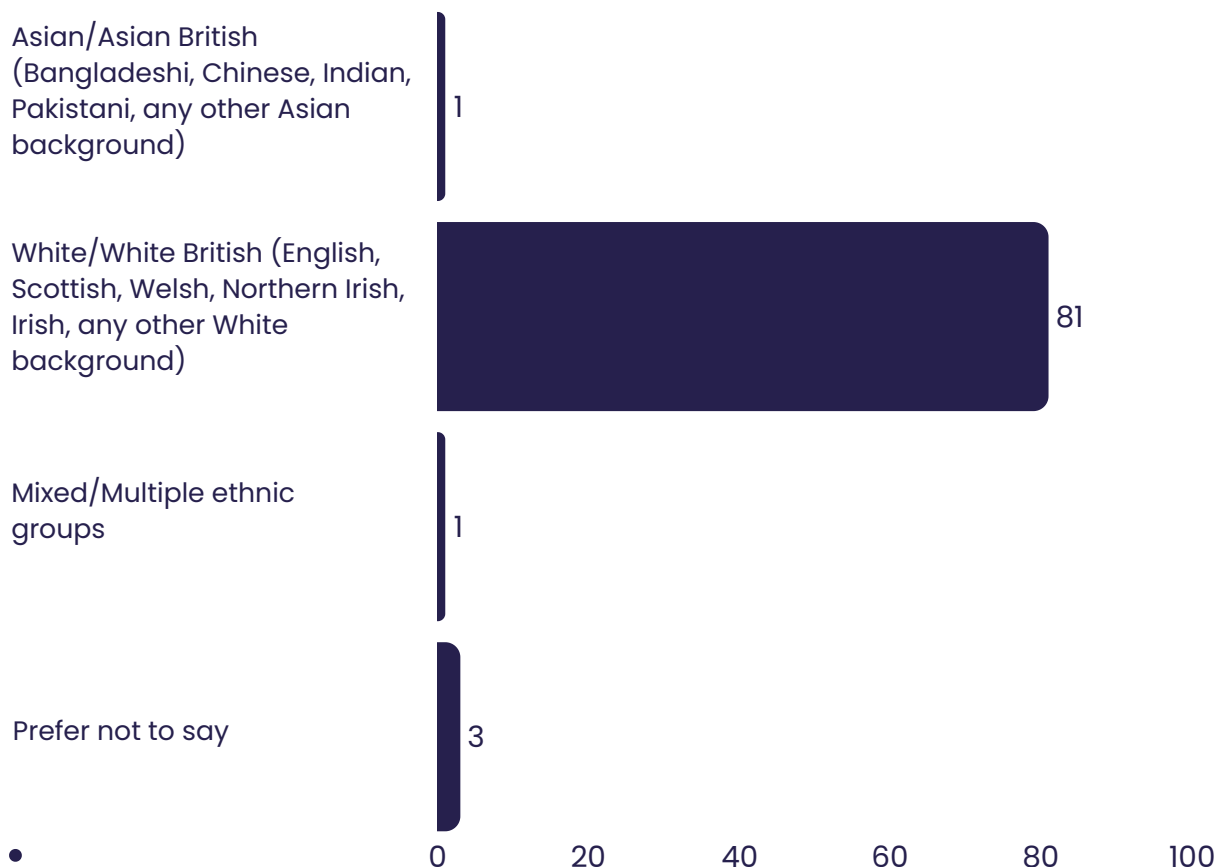




How old are you?

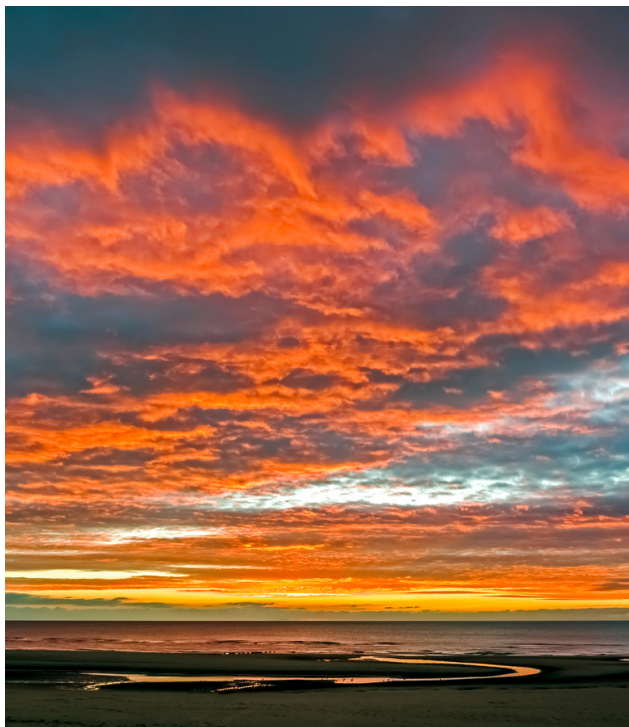
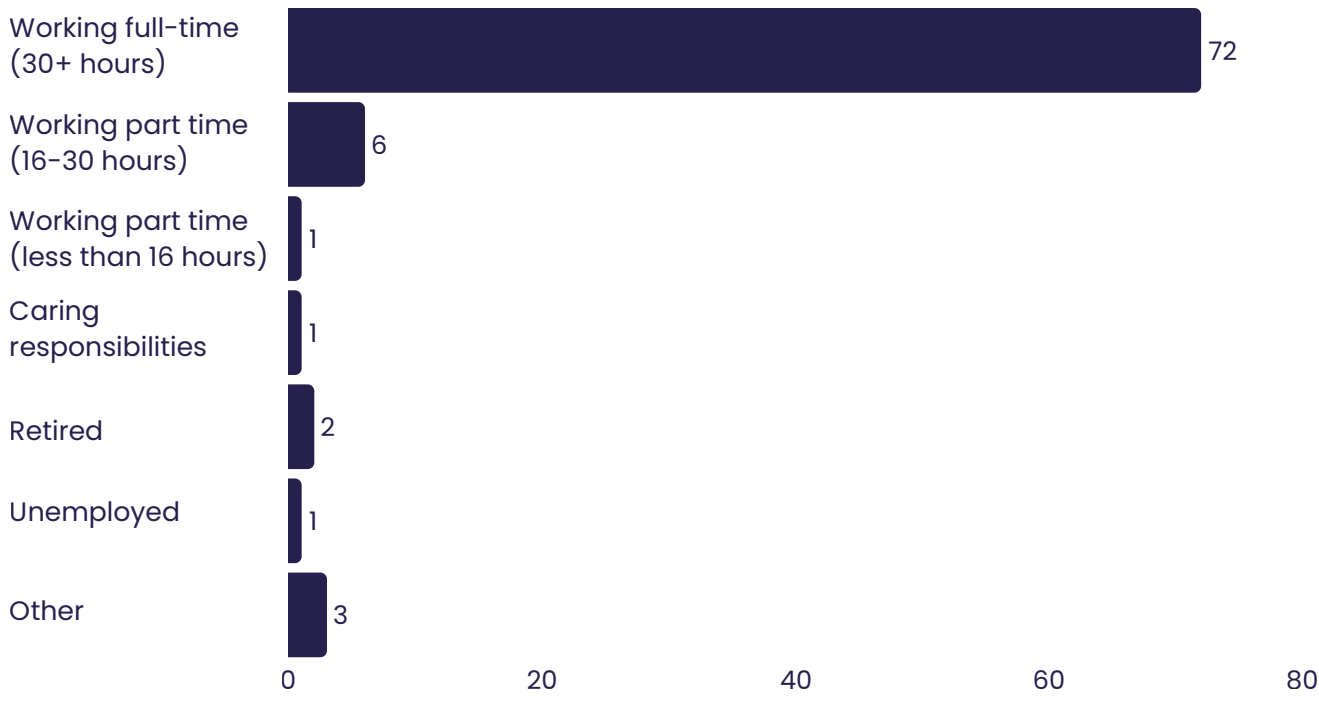


What is your ethnicity?





What is your employment status? Please select all that apply:



Conclusion

The findings presented within this report reinforce the growing recognition of gambling related harm as a significant Public Health concern, affecting individuals and communities across Blackpool. The impact of gambling related harms extends far beyond financial loss, impacting mental and physical health, relationships, and overall wellbeing. Importantly, these harms are not confined to individuals who gamble themselves, but are also experienced by family members, friends and wider social networks.



The survey reveals that gambling is both prevalent and highly accessible, with many respondents either engaging in gambling directly, or knowing someone who has done so recently. Whilst some participation may be recreational, a notable proportion of respondents reported gambling beyond affordable limits, often resulting in financial hardship and, in some cases, extreme coping behaviours, such as borrowing, debt accumulation or criminal activity. These experiences reinforce the understanding of gambling harm as a complex issue, rather than solely an individual behavioural choice.

A key finding was early exposure to gambling, suggesting that preventative efforts must begin at a young age. Respondents highlighted education as central to prevention, including integrating gambling awareness into school curriculums, improving parental understanding of digital access, and promoting open conversations to reduce stigma. This is intensified by Blackpool's environment, where a high concentration of gambling opportunities may increase vulnerability, particularly in already deprived communities.

Feedback highlighted the far-reaching impacts of gambling related harm, including relationship breakdowns, dishonesty, and social isolation. These issues place significant strain on personal connections and were often accompanied by anxiety, emotional distress, and physical neglect, having a toll on overall wellbeing. These findings emphasise the need for person-centred, wraparound support beyond one off interventions, with respondents valuing accessible services such as helplines, online platforms, and counselling, providing non-judgemental spaces for support.

Local support groups were identified as a vital component of recovery, with demand for both in person and online options to ensure accessibility. Participants highlighted the need for greater availability and improved promotion of these groups, alongside stronger links to other services, such as debt advice.





Conclusion

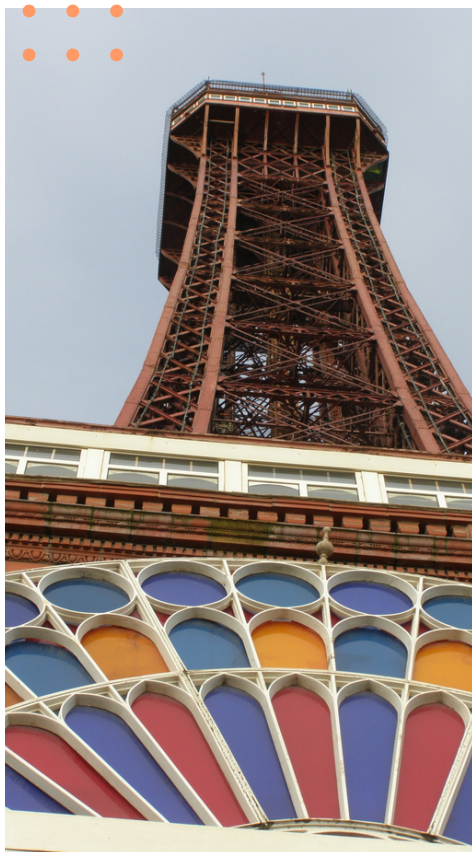
Encouragingly, awareness of support services appeared relatively high among respondents, however this does not necessarily translate into confidence in accessing help, or perceptions of sufficient support availability. This suggests that whilst services exist, there is a need to strengthen their visibility, accessibility, and perceived effectiveness. Respondents called for more consistent and widespread communication, including targeted campaigns and the use of community settings such as healthcare services, workplaces, and gambling venues to increase awareness and early identification.

In addition to support and prevention, there was a clear call for a stronger regulatory approach. Participants expressed concern regarding the normalisation of gambling, particularly through advertising and the density of gambling venues. Suggestions included stricter controls on availability, limitations on high-risk products, and the implementation of local planning measures to reduce area saturation. Practical safeguards, such as tools to help individuals manage spending, were also identified as important protective measures.

The importance of strengthening community resilience was evident throughout the findings. Participants highlighted the value of creating inclusive, non-judgmental spaces and promoting alternative activities that encourage social connection. Reducing isolation and increasing access to meaningful engagement opportunities were seen as key protective factors in preventing gambling related harm.

Overall, the report highlights the importance of a coordinated, multi-agency approach to addressing gambling harms in Blackpool. Prevention, early intervention, education, regulation, and person-centered support must operate in an integrated and coordinated way, alongside sustained efforts to reduce stigma and strengthen public awareness. By listening to lived experiences and responding to identified needs, there is a clear opportunity to develop more effective, inclusive, and responsive services that can mitigate harm and support individuals and families towards recovery.





Contact Us



0300 32 32 100 (Option 1)



GRH@empowermentcharity.org.uk



www.empowermentcharity.org.uk



Empowerment Base, 333 Bispham Road, FY2 0HH

Thank You!





Get in touch to find out more:

www.empowermentcharity.org.uk

0300 32 32 100 (Option 1)

