Gamble**Aware**

Understanding the value of the Annual GB Treatment and Support Survey

On 23 March 2022, GambleAware published the Annual GB Treatment and Support Survey 2021, carried out by YouGov.

The survey had a sample size of over 18,000 individuals, with data weighted to be representative of adults (aged 18+) in Great Britain by age, gender, UK region, socio-economic group and ethnic group. While the figures in the survey may be seen as upper bound compared to other estimates, they are the result of a rigorous and careful process that has been designed to be as representative as possible. Nevertheless GambleAware has taken care not to overstate that the prevalence estimates from this survey.

Of course, no survey method is perfect, and all methods are subject to potential biases of one form or another. GambleAware acknowledges and agrees with the conclusions of the methodology review it commissioned from Professor Patrick Sturgis, and is working to implement his recommendation to continue with the use online surveys in conjunction with "a programme methodological testing and development". It is also worth noting that the Gambling Commission is currently trialling a pilot of an online survey for estimating gambling prevalence, the results of which we look forward to with interest.

In practice it is debatable whether there exists a clear and unequivocal hierarchy of survey methods for all needs and purposes.

First, the impact of stigma and socially desirable responding in different survey formats remains an open question: it is not actually testable with current datasets, and therefore not falsifiable.

Second, GambleAware has a particular concern around hidden and vulnerable groups, whom evidence suggests are more likely to experience gambling harms, more likely to suffer from multiple vulnerabilities or comorbidities, and less likely to access support. These groups may not be living in private residential addresses and therefore tend to be excluded from many existing surveys.

Third, and most important, different surveys serve different functions. The core purpose of the Annual GB Treatment and Support Survey is to complement rather compete, and provide evidence where currently there is none. It remains the best available dataset – and often the *only* dataset – for exploring: the ways in which gambling harms and access to support are distributed across different groups, including minority communities and vulnerable groups;

subgroup analysis focussed specifically on these groups; the relationships between gambling harms and other factors including social and environmental characteristics; in-depth analysis focussed specifically on people experiencing gambling harms; the effects and consequences of gambling harms; the variation in gambling experiences and harms regionally and sub-regionally; the factors determining the demand for, usage of, and experiences of treatment and support among people experiencing gambling harms (including quantifying the effect of stigma on access to support); and the scale, experiences and needs of people who are affected by someone else's gambling. No 'gold standard' survey, if one exists, will ever contain even a fraction of this information.

In the real world of systems and services, answering these broader questions is what actually matters for tackling gambling harms in Great Britain. GambleAware commissions the Annual GB Treatment and Support Survey to support the design, targeting, delivery and impact measurement of its prevention and behaviour change campaigns; the National Gambling Treatment Service; and a wider public health strategy rooted in communities, inequalities and lived experience.

There is an extremely important debate to be had about how online surveys – which many agree will eventually and inexorably become the default method of population surveying – can be refined in order to match more traditional survey techniques for estimating population quantities, both in terms of sampling frame and in the engagement of offline populations. There is also a need to discuss how to ensure that the most hidden and vulnerable groups are not systematically excluded from data collection, and that all forms of data collection provide a safe space for respondents to talk about sensitive issues such as gambling. GambleAware strongly welcomes these debates and is working to advance them. This will help to find the right balance between statistical purity tests and real-world considerations.