

# Preventing gambling related harm in adolescents (PRoGRAM A) a secondary school based social network intervention: results from a process evaluation

Dr Martine Miller <sup>(1)</sup>, Freya Howell <sup>(1)</sup>, Angela Niven <sup>(1)</sup>, Leon Noble <sup>(1)</sup>, Professor Jamie White<sup>(2)</sup>, Dr Chris Wier<sup>(3)</sup>, Dr Hanna Ensor <sup>(3)</sup>, Andrew Stodart <sup>(3)</sup>, Professor Heather Wardle <sup>(4)</sup>, Dr Dave Griffiths <sup>(5)</sup>, Dr Richard Purves <sup>(5)</sup>, Dr Fiona Dobbie <sup>(1)</sup>  
1 University of Edinburgh 2 University of Cardiff 3 Edinburgh Clinical Trials Unit (ECTU) 4 University of Glasgow 5 University of Stirling  
This study was funded by the NIHR Public Health Research programme (NIHR150838).



**Background:** Young people’s engagement in gambling can be linked to gambling-related harm (GRH). This can cause stress, anxiety, relationship issues, debt, and lost opportunities<sup>(1)</sup>. There is a lack of independently funded, and evidence-based school-based interventions that seek to prevent and reduce the harms associated with gambling. PRoGRAM-A is one of the first independently research funded interventions to prevent gambling related harm in adolescents <sup>(2)</sup>. This paper presents findings from an embedded process evaluation of the pilot cluster randomised control trial of PRoGRAM-A, with a specific focus on intervention fidelity, feasibility and acceptability<sup>(3)</sup>.

### Aims:

- To assess intervention fidelity, feasibility and acceptability to multiple stakeholder groups

### Methods:

- The pilot cluster Randomised Control Trial (RCT) of PRoGRAM-A commenced in March 2023. PRoGRAM-A was delivered in four secondary schools across the Scottish central belt, with two control schools.
- An embedded multi-modal process evaluation ran parallel to the delivery of PRoGRAM-A intervention.
- The process evaluation was conducted between January and October 2024.

### What is PRoGRAM-A?

- A novel peer-led, social network intervention grounded in diffusion and network intervention theory.
- Secondary school students aged 13-15 were asked to nominate opinion leaders within their year group, to become a ‘Peer Supporter’.
- Students across an entire year group (aged 13–15 year-olds) complete the following questions: ‘who do you respect’; ‘who are good leaders in sports and other group activities’; and ‘who do you look up to’.
- Purpose of the nomination form was for students (not teaching staff) to identify students of influence.
- Students receiving the most nominations (18%) were invited to become Peer Supporters and take part in a two-day gambling education training programme.
- Training was delivered by youth workers to Peer Supporters using fun and engaging activities, centred on four key topics: what is gambling, gambling and gaming, gambling marketing, and gambling harm.
- Peer Supporters are then encouraged to initiate conversations about gambling harm with their peers, friends and family networks, using communication styles they judged to be most appropriate.

### Data Collection:

- Qualitative consultation with:
  - teachers (n=6),
  - parents/carers (n=2), public
  - health stakeholders (n=8),
  - students (n=25).
- Structured observation of the delivery of PRoGRAM-A in two schools.

### Results

#### Acceptability

- High acceptability among all stakeholder groups in relation to:
  - Topic relevance
  - External trainer and peer trainer delivery model
  - Teacher willingness to embed PRoGRAM-A in future curriculum
- Acceptability of relevance and ease of integration of PRoGRAM-A into school curriculum.

#### Feasibility

- High fidelity in pilot delivery (all topics and activities delivered).
- Positive reception to peer-led intervention model across all stakeholder groups.

#### Intervention refinements

- Incorporate lived experiences in training.
- Enhance engagement with female students.



### Conclusion

- The process evaluation demonstrated that it is feasible and acceptable to deliver the PRoGRAM-A gambling harm reduction intervention within secondary schools with a high degree of fidelity.
- Addressing the topic of gambling and GRH within the school curriculum was deemed to be acceptable by all sample groups, including students.
- PRoGRAM-A is effective and well-received.
- Results support progression to a phase III RCT.



*I'd say peer-to-peer is like a much more common thread in education now anyway, that they take responsibility for what's going on. So it's like lots of skills around... like the skills that they're learning, aside from the gambling stuff. - Teacher*

*I think [peer models are] better than the teacher because it's someone your age that you're up close to, I think you like believe it more and actually listen to them. Bonnie, Non-Peer Supporter*

*that's a really important part [social skills], that's the valuable bit for the children as much as the gambling ... is the fact that... you know, building up their confidence – “social skills,”... it's that element of being good for them in an overall setting of how to grow up and how to mature and ... pass the message they've learnt back to people. I'd be surprised if nearly all parents didn't sort of say that would be a good thing that they'd want their children to be included in. - Parent*

