



# Online gambling and free-to-play online gaming engagement and harms

Online gambling is highly accessible and is converging with other technologies. For example, free-to-play (F2P) online games often contain gambling-like elements. F2P games are free to download and play online but often encourage players to repeatedly spend small amounts of real money (a microtransaction). A common type of microtransaction is a 'loot box' where players can purchase a randomly generated virtual item, such as a new appearance for their playable character (called a skin), or an in-game weapon. Loot boxes are like an old-fashioned lucky dip with the chance of receiving a rare or 'valuable' item being very slim.



To explore online gambling and F2P online gaming behaviours and identify populations that are most at risk of harm from these activities, we conducted an online survey of 4,180 adults across New Zealand who engaged in online gambling, F2P gaming, or both (dual users).

## Participation in online gambling and F2P gaming

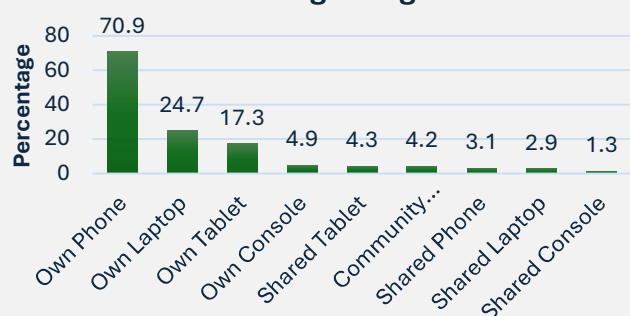
Slightly more males were online gamblers (55.5%) or dual users (56.1%), while slightly more females were F2P gamers (53.4%). **More than one-quarter of F2P gamers (28.2%) and dual users (29.5%) were aged 18 to 34 years, compared to 12.8% of online gamblers. Nearly half (47.2%) of online gamblers were aged 55 years or older.** More Māori, Pacific and Asian people were dual users than were online gamblers or F2P gamers.



## How online gambling and F2P gaming were accessed

Most participants accessed online gambling and/or F2P gaming via their own phone, laptop or tablet.

### Devices used for online gambling/ F2P gaming

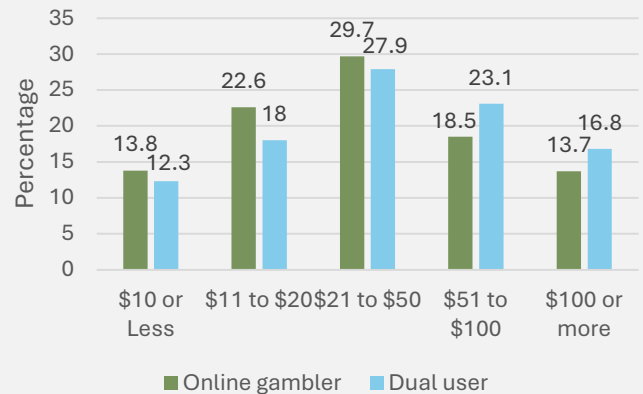


Multiple responses were allowed

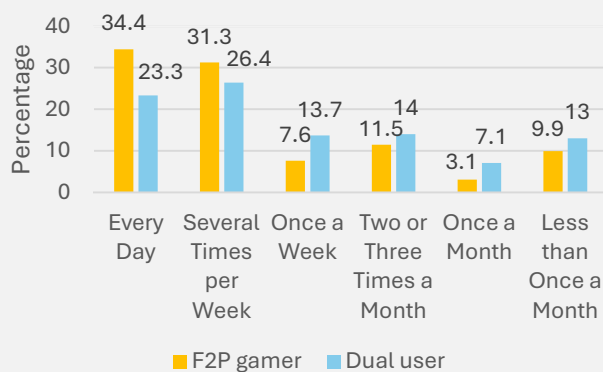
### Online gambling behaviours

More dual users took part in each gambling activity than online gamblers, except for Lotto which was the most popular and similar between the two groups. Other common online activities were scratch tickets, sports betting, and pokie (gaming) machines. Almost half of online gamblers (43.6%) and dual users (46.9%) gambled weekly or more often. Compared to 11% of online gamblers, more dual users (26.9%) gambled online for longer than intended. More online gamblers (55.9%) only gambled on one online activity, compared with 34.4% of dual users, of whom 45.8% gambled on two to three online activities. Dual users tended to have longer gambling sessions. Monthly spend on online gambling was similar between dual users and online gamblers, with about 28% (the highest proportion) spending \$21-\$50 per month.

### Monthly spend on online gambling



### Frequency of F2P gaming



### F2P gaming behaviours

More F2P gamers (73.3%) than dual users (63.4%) participated in F2P gaming weekly or more often. F2P gamers and dual users most often had gaming sessions of up to two hours, but 20.5% of F2P gamers and 23.1% of dual users gamed for sessions of up to 10 hours or longer. Typical spend on a single microtransaction ranged from \$1 to \$10+, with \$3 to \$4.99, and \$10+ being the most common.

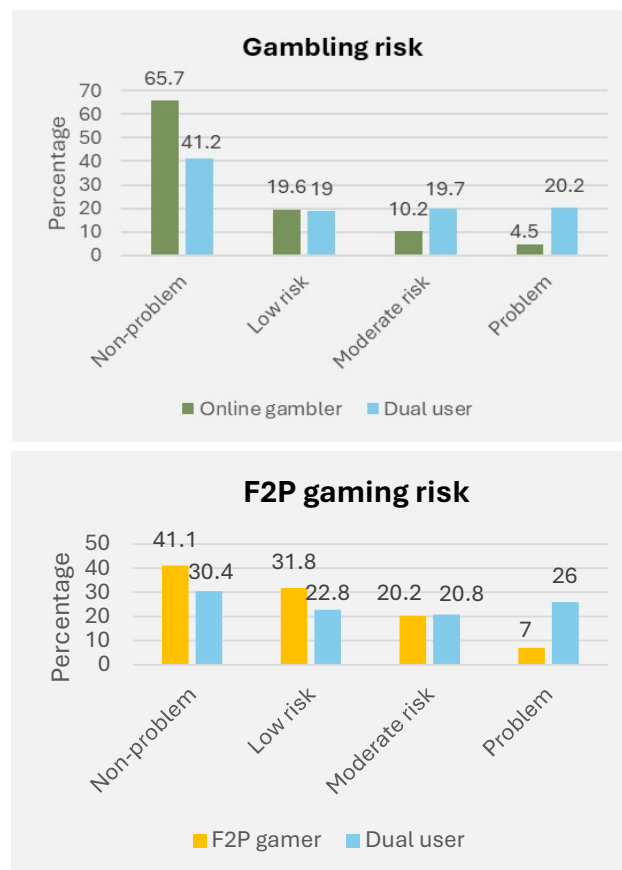
### Top reasons for spending money on microtransactions

1. Take advantage of special offers
2. Get the most out of the game
3. Be able to continue playing
4. Increase chances of winning
5. Get more time in the game



## Online gambling and F2P gaming risk and harm

More dual users (58.9%) than online gamblers (34.3%) were risky (low, moderate or problem) gamblers. Similarly, more dual users (69.6%) than F2P gamers (59%) were risky gamers. More than half of dual users experienced any gambling and F2P gaming harm compared with 38.8% of F2P gamers and 26.8% of online gamblers. The top four harms were reduced spending money, reduced savings, less spending on recreation, and regrets about gambling/gaming. Some participants tried to reduce or stop gambling. Of these, more dual users (54%) than gamblers (31%) started gambling again after receiving inducements (e.g. bonus bets) or after seeing gambling ads.



## Strong associations with moderate risk/problem gambling and F2P gaming

### Higher risk - gambling

- Asian ethnicity vs. Pākehā: 1.81x ↑ risk
- Daily virtual (play money) gambling vs. ≤monthly virtual gambling: 2.64x ↑ risk
- Virtual gambling session ≥15 minutes vs. <15 minutes: 1.74 - 3.65x ↑ risk (risk increased with increased session length)
- Real money gambling session ≥15 minutes vs. <15 minutes: 1.90 - 3.28x ↑ risk (risk increased with increased session length)

### Higher risk - F2P gaming

- Session length ≥ 1 hour vs. <30 minutes: 1.92 - 2.23x ↑ risk (risk increased with increased session length)
- Buying loot boxes weekly/daily vs. <monthly: 2.22x ↑ risk

### Lower risk - gambling

- 55+ years vs. 18-24 yrs: 0.29x ↓ risk
- Annual personal income ≥\$50,001 vs. ≤\$20,000: 0.56 - 0.35x ↓ risk (risk decreased with increased income)

### Lower risk - F2P gaming

- No factors identified

## Acknowledgements

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AUT Gambling and Addictions Research Centre: Contact Information

 [garc@aut.ac.nz](mailto:garc@aut.ac.nz)

 <https://garc.aut.ac.nz>