

Self-reported changes in online gambling habits and reasons during the first year of COVID-19 pandemic

What this research is about

In Québec, Canada, public health measures to curb the COVID-19 pandemic included the closure of all land-based gambling venues. Thus, people had to either stop or reduce their gambling, or use new or alternate gambling platforms (e.g., online lotteries, poker, and slot machines). The purpose of this study was to examine self-reported changes in gambling habits of adults living in Québec during the first year of the pandemic after the implementation of public health restrictions. The study also examined the reasons why people changed their gambling habits.

What the researchers did

The researchers conducted a mixed-methods study in 2021. A quantitative survey was first developed to understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on gambling behaviours. Participants were adults (aged 18 or older) living in Québec who gambled online. The researchers used a hybrid sampling technique to recruit a telephone-based sample and an additional online sample through a web panel (Léger Marketing, Montréal). The final sample consisted of 4,676 participants. Most participants were male (65.1%).

Participants reported their participation in 9 online gambling activities during the last 12 months (i.e., the first year of the pandemic), as well as during the 12 months before the pandemic. They completed the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI).

Participants also reported changes in their online gambling frequency, amount of money, and time

What you need to know

This study examined self-reported changes in gambling habits and reasons for such changes during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. A quantitative survey of 4,676 adults who gambled online and lived in Québec, Canada, was conducted in 2021. This was followed by interviews with 96 participants. The prevalence of online gambling during the first year of the pandemic was estimated to be 15.6–20.3%. About 5.6% of participants gambled online for the first time during the pandemic, while 14.7% gambled online both before and during the pandemic. Only 1.4% of participants quit online gambling during the pandemic. The impact of the pandemic was similar for frequency, amount of money, and time spent on different online gambling activities. But day trading increased the most during the pandemic. Participants provided various reasons for stopping or decreasing online gambling during the pandemic, including being less interested in online gambling and having less time and money to dedicate to gambling. The reasons for starting or increasing online gambling included having more time, gambling in the hope of earning money, and to deal with stress and boredom.

spent gambling during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. They reported whether they felt they gambled online less, as much, or more than before

the pandemic. They were also asked to identify reasons for any changes.

To capture the lived experiences of people who gambled online during the pandemic, 415 participants who completed the survey were invited to complete an interview. A total of 96 interviews were conducted.

What the researchers found

The prevalence of online gambling during the first year of the pandemic was estimated to be 15.6–20.3%, which indicates an increasing trend in online gambling in the province. About 5.6% of participants gambled online for the first time during the pandemic. These participants were new to gambling or migrated from offline to online gambling. About 14.7% gambled online both before and during the pandemic. Only 1.4% quit online gambling during the pandemic.

In general, the impact of the pandemic was similar for frequency, amount of money, and time spent on different online gambling activities. But day trading increased the most during the pandemic. Both people who were new to gambling and those who migrated from offline to online gambling were more likely to report lottery gambling and less likely to report gambling on scratch cards and instant lotteries, sports, and poker. Participants who gambled online both before and during the pandemic engaged in more gambling activities. They were also more likely to experience moderate-risk or problem gambling.

In the survey, participants provided reasons as to why they stopped or decreased their online gambling during the pandemic. The most common reason was being less interested in online gambling, followed by cost and having less time. Some participants did not want to gamble around family members, felt that they gambled too much, or cited mental health reasons. Interview data also supported these findings, adding that some felt that their habits were unhealthy, and that the pandemic created an opportunity to refocus one's priorities on other things.

In contrast, some participants began to gamble online because they were not able to gamble in a

physical venue. Participants who continued to gamble online reported doing so because they had more time. Feelings of boredom and isolation, wanting to relax or disconnect, and wanting to make money were also common reasons for starting or increasing online gambling. In interviews, participants described how gambling online helped them deal with the stress caused by the pandemic. Some participants gambled more online in the hope of earning money, as their income was reduced due to COVID-related work changes.

How you can use this research

This research can be used to help develop regulatory measures and support systems for online gambling.

About the researchers

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Citation

Kairouz, S., Savard, A. C., Murch, W. S., Dixon, M. R., Blanchette Martin, N., Brodeur, M., Dauphinais, S., Ferland, F., Hamel, D., Dufour, M., French, M., Monson, E., Van Mourik, V., & Morvannou, A. (2025). A portrait of online gambling: A look at a transformation amid a pandemic. *Harm Reduction Journal*, 22, 136. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12954-025-01265-1>



Study Funding

This study was funded by Fonds de recherche du Québec – Société et culture.

About Greo Evidence Insights

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