

GREGO BRIEF:

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT THE EXPANSION OF TABLE GAMES

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WHO PLAYS TABLE GAMES?

Different types of gambling activities attract qualitatively different types of gamblers. While earlier research indicated that older adults preferred table games such as cards¹, recent studies suggest that people who play table games tend to be male, younger, more highly educated, and married.²⁻⁶ They may also be more likely to abuse substances such as alcohol.^{4, 6} Reasons for participating in table games can differ from other types of gambling. Table game players appear to be more motivated by money, excitement, self-esteem, competition, and social interaction than any other gambling type.^{2, 6} They also tend to be extroverted, interested in numerical information, and believe that they can control the outcome of events that, in reality, they have no influence over (i.e., they more often experience the *illusion of control*).^{2, 6}

There also seems to be cultural differences with respect to table games. They may be especially popular among Asian players⁷⁻¹², since table games can be perceived as more exciting, with more opportunities to win larger amounts of money quickly when compared to other games like slots. Table games are also viewed as more social than other types of gambling, which is important since, historically, gambling functioned as a social leisure activity.

DO TABLE GAMES CAUSE PROBLEM GAMBLING?

Research findings on the relationship between table games and problem gambling are mixed.¹³ Generally, games with a faster rate of play (e.g., Electronic Gambling Machines [EGMs]) are more strongly related to problem gambling than slower games (e.g., lotteries). Table games are situated somewhere in the middle.¹⁴ Importantly, gamblers who play table games are also likely to play EGMs. The combined effects of both types of play may help to explain why these gamblers report gambling problems more often than others.¹⁵ In Australia, the highest rates of problem gambling were found among those who played casino table games at a rate of 6.1%. Meanwhile, there were lower rates of 4.7% for EGM play and 4.5%

for betting on the races.¹⁶ Another Australian study showed that higher risk gamblers were more likely to bet on casino table games¹⁷, but a follow-up study by the same authors reported that casino table games were the least problematic form of gambling for internet-based, land-based, and mixed-mode problem gamblers.¹⁸

In Canada, longitudinal research shows that high involvement in EGM or casino table games is the third strongest predictor of future problem gambling.¹⁹ Another Canadian study reported that table games were particularly problematic for internet gamblers, but not for non-internet gamblers; instead, EGMs were problematic for non-internet gamblers.²⁰ Finally, research conducted in Ontario found that 12.1% of table game players are high-severity problem gamblers, and that problem gamblers account for 56.9% of table game revenue. This makes table games the second most problematic form of gambling after slot machines.²¹ One of the reasons table games may be problematic is that they are often played with higher stakes.

IS GAMBLING AT HIGH STAKES RISKY?

Gambling at higher stakes and with more variability is predictive of gambling problems^{22, 23}, perhaps because decision-making is impaired with higher stakes, regardless of the outcome (i.e., winning or losing). This could be due to an increase in impulsivity.²⁴ Intensive involvement in continuous forms of gambling like casino table games is also one of the strongest predictors of problem gambling.²⁵ In order to help combat higher stakes, researchers are working to develop low-risk gambling limits, similar to low-risk drinking guidelines that already exist in Canada.

Researchers who examined expenditures on casino games (including both table games and EGMs/VLTs), reported that expenditures of \$27.50 to \$110 per month may lead to harmful gambling, and spending more than \$180 per month could lead to problem gambling.²⁶ Currie and colleagues²⁷ have analyzed large, longitudinal datasets to find points at which the risk of gambling harm sharply increases. Their low-risk gambling guidelines suggest that people should gamble no more than eight times per month, spend less than \$75 CAD per month, or spend less than 1.7% of one's income on gambling. The study did not attempt to create game-specific guidelines.

For low-risk gambling guidelines to be successful, Abbott²⁸ believes that researchers need to consider particular gambling forms, such as table games, and settings when designing the guidelines. He argues that three important factors must be taken into account: (1) the length of gambling sessions, (2) the number of gambling activities in which people participate, and (3) the variance in how thresholds are applied to different groups, “especially high-risk population sectors such as youth and some indigenous, ethnic and migrant groups” (p. 2021).

WHAT ABOUT RESPONSIBLE GAMBLING AT TABLE GAMES?

No research was found that looked specifically at responsible gambling for table games; however, self-exclusion is helpful for many gamblers, including those that play table games.¹⁷ Interestingly, a recent study found the largest reduction in gambling behaviour occurred among people who said their favourite games before self-exclusion were casino table games.²⁹ The use of Onsite Casino Information Centres may also be helpful for a variety of gamblers, including those who prefer table games.³⁰

WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF TABLE GAME EXPANSION?

There is a lack of research on the effects of table game expansion. So far, research suggests that the expansion of table games not only has a positive effect on own-casino revenues³¹, but also has a positive impact on competing casinos.³² In order to stay competitive in the gambling market, some states have turned to the legalization of table games. Specifically, Rhode Island legalized table games at the Twin River casino in mid-2013. Pennsylvania also legalized table games at its casinos in 2010. This was met with much success in terms of breaking revenue records.^{33, 34} Revenue from table games in Pennsylvania continues to rise³⁵, and new gaming law in Pennsylvania allows for mini-casinos with table games.³⁶

Concerns have been voiced about the potential for higher levels of problem gambling with the expansion of table games. In 2012, the Department of Drug and Alcohol Services in Dauphin County, Pennsylvania adopted a community-centric approach to raise awareness of problem gambling. Using state funding, they were able to create a prevention curriculum for middle school students, host training events for social services providers, hold town hall meetings, and organize a flea market-type event called “Give Back Day” where people were provided with information about problem gambling.³⁴

Unfortunately, there is no direct evidence of the effects of table game expansion on rates of problem gambling. For additional information on casino expansion in Canada and its possible effects on problem gambling see:

- Gambling Expansion in Canada: An Emerging Public Health Issue. Ottawa, ON: Canadian Public Health Association; 2000. Available from: <https://prism.ucalgary.ca/handle/1880/49475>
- Health and Social Impacts of Gambling. Hamilton, ON: Hamilton Public Health; 2012. Available from: http://www2.hamilton.ca/NR/rdonlyres/C7B7E1CE-8E34-49BC-AD3B-2A57DAFACC5B/0/Dec03EDRMS_n384322_v1_BOH12040_Health_and_Social_Impacts_of_Gambl.pdf

- The Impact of Gambling Expansion in Ontario Q&A. Toronto, ON: Problem Gambling Institute of Ontario; 2012. Available from: <https://learn.problemgambling.ca/PublishingImages/policy/policy-impact-of-gambling-expansion-in-ontario-q-and-a.pdf>
 - The Health Impacts of Gambling Expansion in Toronto: Technical Report. Toronto, ON: Toronto Public Health and the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health; 2012. Available from: <https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2012/hl/bgrd/backgroundfile-51873.pdf>
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