

research snapshot

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Awareness of responsible gambling among patrons of casinos and racinos in Canada

What this research is about

Responsible gambling (RG) tools are used to prevent and reduce gambling problems and related harms. In 2011, the Responsible Gambling Council (RGC) started a RG Check program. The RGC is a Canadian organization whose stated goal is the prevention of problem gambling. The RG Check program is a nationwide initiative to evaluate and accredit the RG practices of gambling venues. These include land-based casinos and racinos (i.e., horse racing venues that also host slots machines). Gambling venues are assessed when they apply for accreditation. The assessment includes surveys with both patrons and staff. Venues are surveyed every three years if they want to maintain their accreditation. This study is the first to examine data collected from surveys with patrons from 2011–2019. The focus of these surveys was on patrons' awareness of RG information and how to access the information.

What the researchers did

The researchers used three datasets of yearly patron surveys from 2011–2015, 2013–2016, and 2015–2019. In total, there were 18,580 respondents from 75 venues across the datasets. All surveys were brief questionnaires with 1 to –2 pages. Three slightly different surveys were used across the three study periods. All surveys asked patrons about their awareness of RG information, how to access the information, RG information centres, and self-exclusion programs. Patrons were also asked how frequently they gambled at the venue. A few open-ended questions were also included. The researchers collapsed the years into 2012–2015 and 2016–2019. Data from 2011 were not used because there were fewer respondents in 2011 than in later years.

What you need to know

The Responsible Gambling (RG) Check patron surveys provide the largest dataset on awareness of RG among patrons of casinos and racinos in Canada. The researchers analyzed data collected from 2011–2019, which included 18,580 patrons from 75 venues. However, data from 2011 were not used because there were fewer respondents in 2011 than in later years. The results suggested increases in awareness of RG information and behaviour over time, especially among patrons who gambled regularly. However, 13.4% of patrons said they had not seen any RG information at the venue. Even though many patrons were aware of some aspect of RG, considerably fewer patrons reported RG behaviour (i.e., asking staff about an RG information centre and visiting it).

What the researchers found

There were 13,834 patrons who reported gambling regularly (at least once a month) and 3,155 patrons who reported gambling less often. Between 35% to 64.6% of patrons reported awareness of some aspect of RG, depending on the survey questions. The majority said they knew where to access information for help for problem gambling at the venue (64.6%). Most people also reported having seen RG information on slot machines (59.8%). However, only 35% said they had seen information about chances of winning and losing on slots machines. About 13.4% reported they had not seen any RG information.

A considerably smaller number of patrons reported RG behaviour. While 59.3% of patrons said they were aware of RG information centres, only 19% of those

patrons had ever asked a staff person about the centre and 25% had ever visited the centre.

A total of 9,063 responses were collected for the open-ended questions. In one question, just under half of the patrons identified a location in the venue where they could find help for problem gambling. The most commonly identified locations were RG information centres, the washroom, the information desk, and the entrance. About 30% answered the open-ended question about RG information seen on slots machines. Many responses mentioned 'play responsibly', 'play within your limits', 'play smart', 'limit time', etc. About 42% mentioned knowing about helplines or hotlines for problem gambling.

In general, patrons who gambled regularly showed higher awareness of RG information and use of RG behaviour. Still less than 30% of these patrons reported RG behaviour (i.e., asking staff about the RG information centre and visiting the centre).

When the researchers compared the two periods from 2012–2015 and 2016–2019, awareness of RG information had increased over time. This was especially so among people who gambled regularly. Lack of changes were observed for questions about seeing information on chances of winning and losing on slots machines, information on signs of problem gambling, and tips for keeping gambling in control.

Contrary to expectation, gambling venues that had been accredited for more time did not fare better at improving patrons' awareness of RG information. In fact, these venues had lower scores on some questions, such as hearing about an RG information centre. These venues had better scores on two questions regarding hearing about self-exclusion program and seeing RG information posted on slots.

How you can use this research

The researchers suggest that awareness of RG and related tools could be further improved. The results of this study have little information on the impact of RG on behaviour. The researchers suggest that the impact is likely quite low. Thus, there is a need to improve the use of RG tools among patrons.

About the researchers

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Citation

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Gambling Research Exchange (GREO) has partnered with the Knowledge Mobilization Unit at York University to produce Research Snapshots. GREO is an independent knowledge translation and exchange organization that aims to eliminate harm from gambling. Our goal is to support evidence-informed decision making in safer gambling policies, standards, and practices. The work we do is intended for researchers, policy makers, gambling regulators and operators, and treatment and prevention service providers.

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