

research snapshot

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An evaluation of lower-risk gambling limits that predict risk of future gambling-related harm

What this research is about

Canada published its first-ever Lower-Risk Gambling Guidelines (LRGGs) in 2021. The LRGGs are intended to help minimize harm from gambling. They provide quantitative limits on gambling behaviour. The guidelines suggest that people should gamble on two or fewer types of gambling and no more than four times a month. They should also not spend more than 1% of their household income on gambling. Gambling beyond these limits increases the risk of harm.

Research findings have been mixed with respect to specific lower-risk gambling limits. The Canadian LRGGs were developed using a combination of cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses. Cross-sectional analysis estimates concurrent risk (i.e., risk at the current period). Longitudinal analysis estimates prospective risk (i.e., risk in a future period). The combination of both analyses may obscure meaningful differences between the two types of risk. It is important to consider the level of gambling participation that predicts risk of future gambling-related harm. Thus, the purpose of this study was to evaluate lower-risk gambling limits that predict an increased risk of future gambling-related harm.

What the researchers did

The study used data from the Alberta Gambling Research Institute's (AGRI) National Project (ANP) online panel survey. The panel was demographically and geographically representative of the Canadian adult (18+ years) population. Leger Opinion administered the baseline survey between August and October 2018. A total of 10,199 Canadians completed this baseline survey. Only people who indicated that

What you need to know

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the level of gambling participation linked to an increased risk of future gambling-related harm. The study used data from the Alberta Gambling Research Institute's (AGRI) National Project (ANP) online panel survey. Data from Canadian adults were included in the analysis if the respondents (1) completed both the baseline and follow-up surveys and (2) reported gambling participation at both time points. A total of 4,562 people met the inclusion criteria. Overall, the researchers found lower-risk limits similar to the published Lower-Risk Gambling Guidelines (LRGGs). The lower-risk limits found in this study suggest that people should participate in no more than two gambling types and no more than once a week. But the researchers found higher limits for percent of household income spent on gambling between 3.5 and 6.4%, depending on the type of harm. The current LRGGs suggest no more than 1% of household income to be spent on gambling.

they participated in gambling at least once a month over the past year could complete the survey.

Upon completing the first survey, respondents were asked if they were open to being re-contacted for a follow-up survey in the future. The follow-up survey was conducted between August and November 2019. A total of 4,707 people completed the follow-up survey (83% of those who agreed to be re-contacted, and 46% of the baseline sample).

Data from the respondents was included in the analysis if they (1) completed the baseline and follow-

up surveys and (2) reported gambling participation at both time points. A total of 4,562 people met the inclusion criteria.

Respondents completed the following measures:

- Gambling Participant Instrument (GPI), which assessed different dimensions of gambling participation in the past year (e.g., breadth of gambling involvement, number of gambling days per month, and total amount of money spent).
- Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI). Seven of the nine PGSI items assess financial, emotional, relationship, and health harms. The researchers created an index that indicated the endorsement of two or more of these harm items.
- Demographics, including age, gender, ethnicity, educational level, and income.

What the researchers found

Respondents who participated in more gambling types were more likely to experience gambling-related harms. Compared to those who participated in two types of gambling at least once month, those who participated in three types of gambling had almost double the risk of experiencing harm. Across all types of harm, respondents who gambled up to three times a week were more than twice as likely to experience harm than those who gambled once a month or less.

Percentage of household income spent on gambling showed a nonlinear relationship with future risk of harm. Respondents who spent between 1 and 3% of their household income had a lower risk of experiencing harm than those who spent less than 1%. But those who spent more than 5% of their household income were more than twice as likely to experience harm compared to those who spent less than 1% of their income. The researchers cautioned that care must be taken in interpreting these results as data appeared to be missing non-randomly.

Overall, the researchers found lower-risk limits similar to the published LRGs. The lower-risk limits found in this study suggest that people should participate in no more than two gambling types and no more than once a week. But the researchers found higher limits for percentage of household income spent on

gambling; these limits suggest between 3.4 and 6.4% of household income, depending on the type of harm. The current LRGs suggest no more than 1% of household income to be spent on gambling.

How you can use this research

Policy makers and gambling operators can use this research to support safer gambling initiatives.

About the researchers

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Citation

Gooding, N. B., Young, M. M., & Hodgins, D. C. (2024). A longitudinal investigation of lower-risk gambling limits in the Canadian National Study. *Journal of Gambling Studies*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10899-024-10303-9>

Study funding

The online panel survey was jointly funded by the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction, Gambling Research Exchange Ontario, and the Alberta Gambling Research Institute.

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